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ABSTRACT

Data from two surveys were gathered to inform recommendations on how to increase women prisoners' employability upon release in Great Britain. The first survey focused on 567 inmates' work experience and training prior to and during incarceration, as well as their expectations for life outside prison. About 33% of the women worked immediately before imprisonment. Those who had faced problems in securing employment said the problems were caused by lack of qualifications, criminal record, or childcare dilemmas. Two-fifths considered themselves to possess a work skill and/or an educational or vocational qualification. During confinement almost all the women held at least one job. About half believed their work helped them to develop new skills, although only one-third said it would enable them to find a job upon release. Younger women and those serving longer sentences were more likely to take training or education classes. The majority of prisoners anticipated being unemployed after release and facing personal problems. A post-prison survey of 178 of the original respondents revealed that 37% found work subsequent to release. Personal problems were reported by 90%, with about half stating they had received inadequate support from the prison upon release. The authors concluded there is a need for more help in planning for release, including re-integration, social skills, housing, finding work, arranging benefits, and re-establishing family bonds. (Contains 70 tables.) (AJ)

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Women prisoners:

a survey of their work and training experiences in custody and on release

Becky Hamlyn and Darren Lewis

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Women prisoners:
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Becky Hamlyn and Darren Lewis
of BMRB Social Research

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Foreword

This research was commissioned in response to a Prison Service key target for 1999 – to produce recommendations on how to increase the employability of women prisoners on release. BMRB Social Research were commissioned to carry out two surveys of women prisoners. The first of these focused on inmates' experiences of work and training, both prior to custody as well as in prison, and on their expectations for release. For the follow-up survey, BMRB re-interviewed 178 women from the original sample of 567 between five and nine months after their discharge from prison. The aim of this second survey was to find out how the women had actually fared on release.

There is now a substantial body of research evidence which indicates that one of the most important factors in preventing reoffending is for prisoners to gain employment on release. While the findings of this research suggest that establishments can do much to prepare women prisoners for life outside prison, a number of important issues (such as the availability, targeting and relevance of prison-based work, training and education) need to be tackled for this to become the norm. This report makes a valuable contribution to the debate on how best to help prepare women prisoners for life after release.

CHRIS LEWIS
Head of Offenders and Corrections Unit

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Above all, we would like to thank all of the 567 women who took part in our survey, many of whom helped us with a further interview after their release.

Becky Hamlyn

Darren Lewis

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Summary

Background

One of the Prison Service's key targets for 1999 was to form recommendations for the increased employability of sentenced women prisoners. In the autumn of 1998, BMRB carried out a survey of 567 women prisoners to examine the current status of work and training regimes in women's prisons, and to place this in the context of the women's previous work experience, their aspirations for the future, and their perceived barriers for the uptake of a working life on release.

In August and September 1999, a subsample of 178 women from the original survey who had been released for a period of five to nine months were re-interviewed in order to find out about their post-release labour market experiences and how these related to their prison experience.

Research method

The survey sample was restricted to sentenced women prisoners aged 18 to 40, excluding lifers and foreign nationals. Women were interviewed within all 14 HM Prisons and four HM Young Offender Institutions holding sentenced women prisoners. Prisoners were sampled on a random basis from prison lists. The sample was selected to be representative of the relevant prison population by age and sentence length, although prisoners who were due for release before March 1999 were over-sampled in order to maximise the sample for the follow-up study. A total of 567 women were interviewed during October 1998, a net response rate of 85 per cent. The sample was fully representative of the relevant prison population in terms of age, sentence profile, and offence.

Virtually all interviewed prisoners (98%) agreed to participate in the follow-up survey. A total of 307 former inmates were eligible for the follow-up and able to supply contact details for their release. However, as many prisoners had moved on again since and could not be re-located, the number of prisoners ultimately re-interviewed in the follow-up survey was 178, a response of 58 per cent. The follow-up sample was shown to retain its representativeness in terms of key characteristics.

Key findings

Characteristics of women

The majority of women described their current status as single (63%), had dependent children (66%), and were renting from the social housing sector before imprisonment (58%).

About half (53%) of inmates were classified as "medium-term" prisoners, serving a sentence of between 1 and 4 years. The largest offence category was drugs (37%), followed by burglary/robbery (21%) and violence/sex offences (15%). The incidence of drugs offences increased with age of prisoner, although burglary and robbery offences decreased with age.

Pre-sentence work and education

Three in ten women were working in the period immediately before imprisonment, and two-fifths had worked in the preceding 12 month period. Pre-sentence work in this period tended to be characterised as low skill and short-term; a fifth had been working on a temporary/casual basis. A fifth of those who had not worked in the prior 12 months had sought work, although the majority of these had experienced problems which included a lack of qualifications, a previous criminal record, or childcare difficulties. A fifth of women had never worked before their sentence.

Two-fifths of women considered themselves to possess a work skill before starting their sentence. These included clerical/administrative, retail, computing, catering and accounting skills.

Two-fifths of women held at least one pre-sentence educational or vocational qualification. This represents approximately half the proportion of the equivalent age-group in the general population. One in seven respondents (14%) lacked both work *and* qualifications before beginning their sentence, this subgroup being mainly characterised by women with dependent children.

Prison work

Nine in ten inmates had held at least one prison job during their sentence. The most common jobs were those that served to assist in the running and maintenance of the prison, for example cleaning, kitchens and gardening. There was little integration of work and training regimes within prisons: very few women (16%) had done a job which involved

recognised vocational training, although those jobs which were most likely to involve this were kitchen work, machinist work and hairdressing.

Most women with jobs were working on a full-time basis; the mean number of weekly hours worked was 29. The mean weekly wage was about £10, although the majority of women (70%) were earning less than this.

Two-thirds of women said they had been given some degree of choice in the job they were doing at their current prison. The most popular jobs were gardening, kitchens, painting/decorating, farmwork and gym/sports. The most significant factors in the choice of occupation were whether the job was perceived to be enjoyable, the chance of working in the outdoors, to get relevant experience, or for the money. Few women with a prior skill (24%) had had the chance to put this to use in their prison job. The main reason given for this was that the work was simply not available. This suggests an imbalance between the types of work offered to prisoners and those offered on the outside.

Around a half of women with jobs considered that the work had helped them to develop new skills. However, learning a new skill did not necessarily lead to a belief that their work would help them get a job on release. In total, three in ten inmates believed that their prison work would help them to secure a job on release. The main reasons for believing that prison work would not help them on release were either that they had no interest in that type of work, or that the work was too menial. According to inmates, the most useful jobs in terms of helping to secure future employment were kitchens, machinist skills, and gardening.

Prison education & training

Three-fifths of all inmates had attended some form of educational or vocational course during their sentence. Younger respondents and those on longer sentences were more likely than average to have had this opportunity. The most common types of courses attended were IT/computing, English, art/craft/music, catering/hygeine, maths, typing/ word processing and hairdressing. The mean number of weekly hours spent in training was 18.

One in eight inmates admitted problems with either literacy or basic numeracy. Around a half of this subgroup claimed not to have received any help in these areas.

Three in ten inmates had obtained at least one qualification, and a further one in six were working towards one. Qualifications available to inmates were mostly vocational

(NVQs and clerical qualifications); only a very small minority were working towards academic qualifications. The opportunity to obtain certain qualifications is restricted by sentence length. Two-thirds of inmates serving sentences of more than four years were aiming towards a qualification compared with only a fifth of inmates inside for less than a year.

The results indicate a high level of unmet need with regard to training opportunities available to women. The majority of inmates began their sentence with no prior qualifications, and therefore prison offers a good potential to help redress this. However, the results do not support this – women without any pre-sentence qualifications were significantly *less* likely to be aiming towards a qualification compared to those who already had an educational track record. A half of all inmates said that there was a course they would have liked to have done, but that had not been available to them. Younger respondents, those from ethnic minority backgrounds and those admitting basic skills needs expressed the greatest level of unmet need.

A quarter of inmates had received training in job-seeking skills (e.g. application procedures, interview skills, information about vacancies). Availability of this training was weighted towards young inmates, about twice the level of young offenders taking courses compared with the over 30s. Only one in seven inmates serving sentences of no more than a year had received such training.

Intentions for release

Only a third of inmates saw themselves returning to the same accommodation as before their sentence. One in seven inmates had already planned a job for release, the majority were anticipating being either unemployed or at home with domestic responsibilities.

The majority – four-fifths – of respondents with no pre-arranged job intended to look for work on release. Respondents were generally optimistic that they would find the type of work they ideally sought within 12 months after release – seven in ten of those intending to seek work thought this likely. Presence of a prison record was seen as the major barrier by those who thought that job-seeking would be problematic.

Three in ten inmates had planned a course of education or training on release, with young offenders and offenders from ethnic minority backgrounds more likely than average to have done so. Those who lacked any pre-prison education or training experience were less likely than average to have plans for further education on release.

Expected levels of recidivism were low, with one in seven considering this a likelihood. However, expectations of re-offending were strongly related to anticipation of problems on discharge, particularly drug and/or alcohol problems. Half of the repsondents anticipating such problems saw themselves as potential re-offenders.

Two-fifths of the sample considered that their prison experience had helped them in some way towards avoiding crime in the future. It is encouraging to note that those who had "gained" something from their time inside, either in terms of learning new work skills, attending educational courses, working towards a qualification, or receiving training in job skills, were more likely than average to consider that their experience had been beneficial. Those serving longer sentences were particularly likely to acknowledge benefits of the system in terms of the prevention of re-offending.

Respondents were asked for their views on how prison could better prepare them for release. The principal suggestions were better preparation for learning how to re-integrate into society after a long sentence, more help in finding accommodation or work, more home leave availability, more drugs/alcohol misuse courses and a better range of courses in general.

Experience on release

Four in five of the former inmates interviewed in the follow-up study had an address to go to on release, even if only temporary. However, this accommodation tended to be unstable, with a third of these having moved on again since. Less than half (43%) returned to the same address as before prison.

Four-fifths of ex-prisoners had had some contact with the Probation Service on release. Opinions of the Service were not especially positive, with only around half of this subset considering them to have been of some help.

Consistent with expectations while still inside, nine in ten respondents reported problems on release of a personal, financial or domestic nature. Money, accommodation and dealing with depression or emotional problems were the main difficulties. Although most women had family or friends they could turn to, about half considered that they had received insufficient support on release.

The financial situation of former inmates was poor with most single women, and those with children, taking home a household income (from work and/or benefits) of no more than £100 a week. Three in ten respondents admitted to being in debt.

A quarter of ex-prisoners admitted to committing a further offence since their release, higher than prisoners' reported expectations while inside. These tended to be persistent offenders, with most having served at least two prison sentences in the past, and most considering that they will continue to offend in the future. Two-fifths of ex-prisoners admitted to using drugs since their release.

Employment & Education since release

A little over a third (37%) had found work since release, and 25 per cent were in work at the time of interview. Labour market success tended to be related to respondents' pre-prison work record rather than what they achieved in prison. Shorter-term prisoners had greater success in the labour market than those serving sentences of more than a year. Jobs had been obtained mainly though family or friends, small ads, or by returning to the same job as before prison. Only half of respondents with work experience on release had informed their employer about their criminal record.

Consistent with respondents' expectations while still inside, there was little relationship between jobs held on the outside and work experience and skills developed while inside. Only about one in ten of those with post-release work experience said that their job was in any way related to skills they had developed while inside.

About half of all ex-prisoners had actively searched for work since release. Principal methods used were the Jobcentre (79%), newspapers (75%), shop windows (37%) and friends/contacts (30%). The majority of jobseekers (74%) had encountered difficulties in finding work, their criminal record being the principal barrier. Despite their difficulty in finding it, most former inmates had a positive disposition towards work as measured by their agreement towards various attitude statements regarding work and its meaning to them.

Only one in ten had begun a course of education or training since release. Two respondents (out of 178) had embarked upon the New Deal, and six had gained a further qualification since release.

Retrospective views on prison

The majority of former inmates (63%) believe that their prison experience will help them avoid re-offending. The reasons behind this view were mainly rooted in the "negative"

aspects of prison (such as hatred of the institution, loss of freedom, and being apart from their family) rather than "positive" attributes such as work experience, courses and rehabilitation.

When asked directly, less than a third of former inmates considered that they had improved upon their existing work skills, gained work experience, or enhanced their job-seeking skills. However, two-fifths considered that they had learnt new work skills while in prison (even if they did not intend to develop these further). Younger respondents, and those serving sentences of over a year, were more likely than average to acknowledge such benefits of prison.

Most women considered that they not received enough help from the prison for their release. Women needed more help in terms of finding accommodation, looking for work, and helping them to re-adjust.

Implications for policy

Compared with the equivalent age-group of women in the general population, women inmates face many more difficulties. They have a much lower baseline educational and employment record, are more likely to have dependent children, and have a more unstable financial status. Thus, there is considerable potential for prison to help women develop their skills and potential, and to help them plan their future.

However, the results indicate that there is considerable scope for improvement in prison regimes to help achieve this. Although a relatively high proportion of inmates acknowledged that they had learnt new skills as a result of prison work, most did not see that these skills would be transferable into the outside workplace. The majority of work opportunities available to women were those that assisted in the maintenance of the prison, and these were generally considered to be either too menial and unskilled to be of use after release, or did not relate to their career aspirations. In addition, few women with prior skills had been given the opportunity to use or build on these in their prison occupation. Choice of occupation was more likely to be driven by the considered "perks" e.g the enjoyability of the job, the chance to work outside or the money, rather than by the potential to increase their employment chances on release.

There appeared to be little integration of work and training regimes, with most women doing either one or the other. Courses were considered useful by most inmates, although the opportunity to take up courses was often limited by short sentence lengths or lack of availability of relevant courses. Prisons have a good deal of potential to help women with

low baseline qualifications. However, the majority of inmates with no previous educational record were not doing anything in prison to help redress this, nor were they planning anything for after their release. In addition, around half of those with literacy and/or numeracy problems did not consider themselves to have received sufficient help. Thus, the results indicate that courses could be better targeted towards those with the greatest need, which would also help to encourage longer-term planning.

The results also point to a greater need for training in job-seeking skills, such as interview and application techniques, and how to look for work. These courses, when available, tended to be geared towards the younger inmates and those on longer sentences, although most inmates could benefit from some training in this area.

In the prison survey women were generally optimistic that they would find the right type of work on release. However, this was not borne out in reality, with only about one-third of the former inmates interviewed having found work since release, the prison record representing the major barrier for those who had tried but not succeeded. Of those who had worked on release, few women attributed their work success to any work experience, skills, or qualifications gained while inside. Pre-sentence work experience and skills were found to be more important predictors of labour market success.

Consistent with expectations, nearly all women had encountered personal problems on release including difficulties with finances, accommodation, family, depression, and drugs. Although most women had good support networks of family or friends and the Probation Service, many considered that they could have received more help.

Levels of recidivism and drug use were relatively high (higher than expectations while still inside). Recidivism rates were highest among those who had already established themselves as persistent offenders. Drug use was exacerbated by women's experience inside, with a third of prisoners admitting exposure to drugs while in prison.

Most women acknowledged a link between prison and avoidance of future criminal activity. However, their reasons were mainly rooted in the "negative" aspects of prison such as denial of freedom, and the conditions of prison, rather than any constructive regime activities. However, beyond this, there was a widespread need for more help in planning for their release, in terms of re-adjusting/re-integration, social skills, housing, finding work, arranging benefits, and re-establishing family bonds.

1 Introduction

Background

It is accepted that one of the most important factors in the prevention of reoffending is for prisoners to gain employment on release[1]. One of the Prison Service's key targets for 1999 was to form recommendations for the increased employability of women who have served prison sentences, to encompass prison work and training regimes, and to show how prisons can better prepare women for their release more generally.

Previous research in this area[2] tended to have focussed mainly on the needs of male prisoners, who represent the very large majority (96%) of the sentenced prison population[3]. Although the Prison Service had carried out a number of surveys among women prisoners[4], these have been largely concerned with the impact of imprisonment on the families of those with children. Thus there was a need for a more detailed evaluation of the specific experiences and needs of women in relation to work, bearing in mind their more limited work experience and the number who are primary carers.

In order to address this, BMRB International was commissioned by the Prison Service to carry out a survey of women prisoners, examining their work and educational experience before and during their sentence, and subsequently to follow up these women on release to discover how they have fared in the labour market. The prison survey was conducted during October 1998 and the follow-up survey of released prisoners was conducted during August/September 1999.

Aims and scope of the study

The central objective of the study was to identify ways in which prisons can improve their regimes to increase the employability of women on release. The initial survey was restricted to sentenced women aged 18 to 40, the key target population for the Prison Service in terms of these objectives.

1 See e.g. Crow, I., Richardson, P., Riddington, C. and Simon, F. (1989). *Unemployment, Crime, and Offenders*. Routledge, London.

2 Simon, F. and Corbett, C. (1996) *An Evaluation of Prison Work and Training*. Home Office Occasional Paper.

3 *Prison Statistics England and Wales 1997*, Home Office (1998).

4 Morris, A. et al. (1995) *Managing the needs of female prisoners*; Caddle, D. and Crisp, D. (1997) *Imprisoned Women and Mothers*, Home Office.

Specific objectives of the research were to:

- explore women's work and educational history before starting their sentence, including the amount of time spent in work, previous work skills and qualifications obtained;

- investigate the work and training opportunities that have been available to women during their sentence, what has driven their choices, whether they are learning any new work skills, and what further types of skills or qualifications they would like to gain;

- discover women's intentions for their release, both in terms of their work and domestic situation, to what extent prison has played a role in any future work intentions, and what more help they feel they need from the prison to better prepare them;

- on release, to examine women's labour market experiences and to assess the extent to which women's success in the labour market is related to their prison experiences;

- to investigate the range of factors which have a bearing on women's experiences post-release including problems with accommodation, children, drugs, recidivism, the Probation Service and the implications of Home Detention Curfew.

Methodology

Prison survey

The initial survey universe comprised all women aged 18-40 serving prison sentences in England, but excluding the following groups:

- remand prisoners

- category A prisoners

- prisoners serving life sentences

- foreign nationals
- very recent receptions (within the previous 2 weeks)[5]

A total of 567 women were interviewed in the period 5 October to 4 November 1998. Women were sampled within 14 of the 17 female establishments in Britain. Interviewing took place within the prisons, carried out by experienced BMRB survey interviewers.

Sample selection was carried out from prison lists. Prisons were asked to provide a computerised listing of all women prisoners fulfilling the above criteria, together with some key details for each inmate including date of birth, sentence length, main offence category and provisional date of release.

The sample was selected to ensure full representation by age and sentence length, both factors highly relevant to the research aims. However, consideration also needed to be given to the fact that we were intending to follow up prisoners after their release. The intention was to conduct the follow-up survey nine months after the prison survey (August 1999) and for this survey to include all women who had been released for a period of between five and nine months following their original interview (i.e. released before the end of March 1999). However, we did not want to restrict the sample to cover this sub-group exclusively as this would have produced a sample biased towards women with shorter sentence lengths, which in turn would have led to a bias in the survey findings. The sample was therefore segmented into sentence length bands and within each sentence length band, women who fulfilled the above release criteria were prioritised for inclusion in the sample. Within each prison, prisoners were selected in proportion to the inmate population as defined by our survey criteria.

As the prison population is relatively transient, with several inmates being released or transferred to other prisons on a daily basis, the sampling was conducted as close to the fieldwork start period as possible. However, a proportion of inmates had become ineligible by the start of fieldwork. Out of an initial total of 817 inmates selected, 146 (18%) had either been released or transferred in the interim period between sampling and fieldwork. Of the remaining eligible inmates, an overall response rate of 85 per cent was obtained, the remainder having either refused or been non-contactable during the fieldwork period.

The resultant sample was shown to be fully representative of the prison population

5 This group was excluded as we felt that prisoners who had just arrived could be still settling in, and their custodial experiences would still be relatively limited.

(see Chapter 2). Weighting has been applied in analysis to correct for variable selection probabilities of inmates within prisons.

At the end of the interview, women were asked for their permission for BMRB to re-contact them after release, and to supply any known contact information. Virtually all interviewed prisoners (98%) agreed to participate in the follow-up survey.

Full details of the research methodology, together with fieldwork documents can be found in a separate technical report printed by BMRB.

Post-release survey

Of the 567 women in the initial prison sample, 13 women refused to be re-contacted and 20 could not supply any contact information for their release. An additional 205 were not due for release until after the end of March 1999, and thus did not fulfil our criteria for inclusion in the follow-up survey. This left a remainder of 329 women who were potentially eligible for follow-up. In May 1999 BMRB sent a letter to all women within this sub-group explaining our intention to re-contact them, together with a form asking them to provide any updated contact information; 110 women responded and address information was updated where available. As a result of the mailshot, nine women refused to be further contacted, one had died, and a further 12 addresses were deemed to be out-of-scope (e.g. address abroad). Thus, 307 contacts were eventually issued to interviewers. Interviewers were given the best information available for each respondent, whether an actual address for that respondent or that of a contact (e.g. parent, friend).

Follow-up interviews were achieved with 178 women, representing a response of 58 per cent from the issued sample. The main reason for loss of interviews was difficulty in tracing respondents: 74 were found to have moved and could not be located, and 14 were back in prison. Thus, of those cases where the interviewer had a possibility of re-contact, the response was 81 per cent.

Note on reporting of survey data

In tables and charts, the following conventions have been used:

- percentages for single-response questions do not always add to exactly 100 (or to sub-group totals) due to the effect of rounding;
- a '*' symbol denotes a percentage of less than 0.5 per cent;
- a '–' symbol represents zero;
- in tables, bases for breakdowns by age and sentence length do not always add to the figure in the "Total" column due to missing data.

2 Profile of the women interviewed

The initial survey was conducted among a representative sample of sentenced women inmates aged 18 to 40 imprisoned during October 1998. The sample excluded foreign nationals and Category A prisoners. In this chapter, we look at the characteristics of the initial survey sample, and where possible we have compared the sample profile with national prison population statistics. However, it should be noted that it has not always been possible to provide exact comparative data. Where the base differs, this has been indicated in the footnote to the table.

Where possible, the profile of female inmates has also been compared with the equivalent sub-group of women in the general population, in order that the specific characteristics of this group can be highlighted.

The profile of the 1999 post-release sample has also been shown alongside for comparison.

Age and ethnicity

One in nine (11%) of the initial sample was classified as a young offender, aged less than 21. Two-fifths (40%) were aged between 30 and 40.

Results are shown in Table 2.1 below, and compared alongside the 1997 Prison Statistics, the latest available at the time of writing. It can be seen that the survey data matches the population statistics very closely.

The profile of the follow-up sample is similar, although there is a slight skew towards the younger age-group.

Table 2.1: Age profile (at time of prison survey)

Base: all respondents

	Prison sample	1997 Prison Statistics	Follow-up sample
Unweighted base:	567	1,626**	178
Weighted base:	567	–	178
	%	%	%
18–20	11	10	15
21–24	22	23	24
25–29	26	28	25
30–40*	40	39	36

* 30–39 in Prison Statistics

** All sentenced female inmates aged 18 to 39 including foreign nationals and lifers.

Four-fifths (80%) of the initial sample described themselves as white, 15 per cent Black and 1 per cent Asian. Only 2 per cent of the sample said that English was not their first language. The ethnic profile is shown below, alongside national Prison Statistics.

Table 2.2: Ethnic origin

Base: all respondents

	Prison sample	1997 Prison Statistics	Follow-up sample
Unweighted base:	567	1,757*	178
Weighted base:	567	–	178
	%	%	%
White	80	84	89
Black	15	13	7
Asian	1	1	2
Other	3	2	1

* All sentenced female British national prisoners – all ages including lifers.

The profiles are similar, although the official statistics are based on female inmates of all ages, which may explain the small discrepancy.

Compared with the national population, the prison population contains a higher proportion of women from ethnic minority groups. In the general population, only 6 per cent of female adults are of non-white origin.[6]

The follow-up sample ethnic profile matches the initial survey sample fairly well, although we have lost proportionally more black respondents at the second survey.

Marital status and presence of children

One in ten (9%) of the initial sample described their current status as married, and a further 15 per cent as cohabiting. Two-thirds (63%) considered themselves single, and one in eight (12%) were either widowed, divorced or separated.

Two-thirds (66%) had dependent children under the age of 18, this figure concurring with other published data.[7] Female inmates are more likely to have children compared with women in the general population. The national proportion of women in a similar age category as the survey population having dependent children is 41 per cent.[8]

Of those with children, half (51%) had pre-school children aged under five, 60 per cent had children aged between five and ten, and 40 per cent had older children of secondary school age.

By age, nearly a third (30%) of young offenders aged 18 to 20 had dependent children, rising to 62 per cent and 83 per cent of women aged 21 to 29 and 30 to 40 respectively.

Table 2.3 displays the full data by age of inmate.

6 Source: General Household Survey 1996.
7 *Women in Prison: A Thematic Review* by H.M. Chief Inspector of Prisons, 1997.
8 Based on women aged 16 to 44. Source: Social Trends 1998.

Table 2.3: Presence and ages of children by age of inmate

Base: all prison respondents

	Total	Age group 18–20	21–29	30–40
Unweighted base:	567	66	269	229
Weighted base:	567	61	274	229
	%	%	%	%
Any dependent children	66	30	60	83
Children aged 0–4	34	31	39	28
Children aged 5–10	40	2	41	49
Children aged 11–18	26	–	6	58

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data on three cases.

Of those with children, only a small minority (3%) of respondents were looking after the child themselves in prison. The majority of inmates' children were being cared for by parents or parents-in-law (48%), or by a husband/partner – either current (17%) or former (12%).

Among the follow-up sample, the proportion of ex-inmates with children had remained almost unchanged (67%).

Accommodation at time of imprisonment

Around a third (35%) of respondents in the initial sample had been living with a partner at the time of imprisonment. A fifth (21%) were living as lone parents, and a further fifth (20%) were living alone (see Table 2.4 below). The majority of the remainder had been living with parents.

Table 2.4: Cohabitees at time of imprisonment

Base: all prison respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	567
Weighted base:	567
	%
With husband/partner	35
With dependent children only	21
Alone	20
With parents/parents-in-law	13
With friends	5
With other adult relations	3
Hostel/homeless	3
Other	*

The majority of women (58%) had been living in accommodation in the social rented sector (i.e. from the council or a housing association). A further 19 per cent were living in private rented accommodation and 14 per cent in owner-occupied accommodation.

Women prisoners were more than twice as likely to be renting from the council or a housing association compared with the national adult population, where a quarter have this tenure (see Table 2.5 below). The national proportion of owner-occupiers is about 26 per cent, around twice that of the survey population.9 Women's accommodation situation on release is covered in Chapter 7.

Table 2.5: Tenure at time of imprisonment

Base: all prison respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	567
Weighted base:	567
	%
Owner-occupied	14
Council/housing association	58
Rented privately	19
Beds	1
Hostel/temporary accommodation	4
Streets	1
Other	2

Sentence length and previous sentences

Information on sentence length was gained from prison records, not from the respondents themselves. The distribution is shown in Table 2.6, alongside the comparative Prison Statistics (although note that the bases are not directly comparable).

It can be seen that the prison survey data matches the population data reasonably closely, although we have under-represented women serving short sentence lengths of up to six months, and correspondingly over-represented women serving medium-term sentences (particularly 18 months up to three years). This is explained by two factors. Firstly, as far as possible we deliberately excluded recent receptions of less than two weeks as we did not want to disturb prisoners who were still settling in, and we also felt that their custodial experience would still be relatively limited. Since short-sentence prisoners would be over-represented in this sub-group, this would partly explain the under-representation. Secondly, we were unable to interview some prisoners because they had been released or transferred in the intervening period between sample selection and

9 Source: General Household Survey 1996.

fieldwork. Naturally those serving very short sentences will have been more likely to fall within this category, and thus this will also have contributed to the shortfall in short-sentence prisoners.

In the follow-up survey, respondents were asked how long a sentence they had *actually* served, and this shows a very different picture from the initial inmate sample. The majority (59%) stated that they had been inside for no more than a year. This would indicate that our follow-up sample is skewed towards shorter-term prisoners. However, many prisoners are released before their official release date and this will mainly account for the difference.

A third (33%) of the initial survey sample had served a previous prison sentence. This rose with age, 23 per cent of young offenders (aged 18 to 20) being multiple offenders, 33 per cent of 21 to 29 year olds, and 39 per cent of those aged 30 to 40. By the follow-up survey, the proportion of previous offenders was slightly lower (29%). This could suggest that the more heavily convicted were harder to trace once released.

Table 2.6: Sentence length and time served

Base: all respondents

	Sentence length		Time served
	Prison sample (from prison records)	1997 Prison Statistics	Follow-up sample (respondent-given info.)
Unweighted base:	562*	1,929**	178
Weighted base:	562	–	178
	%	%	%
Up to 6 months	3	17	27
Over 6, up to 12 months	19	14	32
Over 12, up to 18 months	7	10	22
Over 18 months, up to 3 yrs	35	25	12
Over 3, up to four years	11	11	2
Over 4, up to 5 years	8	8	2
Over 5, up to 10 years	14	14	2
Over 10 years, less than life	3	2	–
Up to 12 months	22	31	59
Over 1year, up to 4 years	53	46	36
4 years, up to life	25	24	4

* Survey base excludes the five cases where sentence length was not recorded.

** All sentenced female prisoners (non-lifers) – all ages including foreign nationals.

Offence category

Main offence category was also obtained via prison records. Offences were categorised into a summary classification. The survey distribution of this is shown in Table 2.7 alongside national data for the total sentenced female population.

The data match the Prison Statistics reasonably well, although the survey data has a higher proportion of inmates serving sentences for burglary and robbery, and a slightly lower proportion of violence/sex and theft/handling offenders. However, this is most likely explained by the differences in age coverage of the comparative statistics. The survey sample is restricted to 18–40, and therefore the crimes committed by younger offenders will have a greater representation in the sample compared with the national data. In fact national statistics show that young offenders are over three times more likely to commit burglary/robbery compared with adult offenders, and therefore this age gradient is the most likely cause of the profile differences.

Table 2.7: Main offence category

Base: all respondents

	Survey sample	1997 Prison Statistics	Follow-up sample
Unweighted base:	550*	1,997**	178
Weighted base:	550	–	178
	%	%	%
Violence/sex offences	15	20	15
Burglary/robbery	21	13	22
Theft and handling	13	17	17
Fraud and forgery	3	6	4
Drugs	37	35	32
Other	11	10	9

* Survey base excludes the 17 cases where offence was not recorded.

** All sentenced female prisoners where offence recorded – all ages, including foreign nationals and lifers

Table 2.8 displays offence category by sentence length and age. In line with the discussion above, burglary and robbery offences decrease sharply with age. However, incidences of theft and handling, and also drugs, increase with age of offender.

In terms of offence category, the follow-up sample matches the original survey sample very closely.

By sentence length, we can see that the longer sentences of at least four years are heavily dominated by drug offences, whereas the shorter sentence lengths include a wider spread of all types of offence.

Table 2.8: Offence by age and sentence length

Base: all prison respondents

	Age			Sentence length		
	18–20	21–29	30–39	<1 year	1<4 years	4 years+
Unweighted base:	66	234	221	112	286	147
Weighted base:*	61	265	221	118	285	142
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Violence/sex offences	16	13	14	15	13	16
Burglary/robbery	35	22	17	8	28	19
Theft and handling	7	12	16	35	10	1
Fraud and forgery	2	4	4	8	4	–
Drugs	23	38	38	20	33	60
Other	18	11	10	14	13	4

* Bases excludes cases where offence, sentence length or age were not recorded.

By ethnic group (Table 2.9), the offences of black/Asian respondents were more heavily biased towards drugs (50% compared with 32% for white respondents). Consequently, sentence lengths for ethnic minority respondents were longer (41% serving over four years compared with 22% for white respondents).

Table 2.9: Offence category and sentence length by ethnic group

Base: all respondents

	White	Black/Asian
Unweighted base:	445	121
Weighted base:	455	111
	%	%
Offence		
Violence/sex offences	14	13
Burglary/robbery	22	16
Theft and handling	13	10
Fraud and forgery	3	5
Drugs	32	50
Other	13	4
Not recorded	3	2
Sentence length		
Up to 12 months	24	15
Over 1, up to 4 years	54	45
4 years, up to life	22	41
Not recorded	*	*

Regime level

The prison sample was roughly evenly split between prisoners who were on a standard regime (54%) and those on an enhanced regime (43%). Three per cent of prisoners in the sample were on a basic level regime[10].

10 Incentives and earned privileges for prisoners are structured in three tiers: basic, standard and enhanced regimes. A prisoner's level will depend on her overall disciplinary behaviour while in custody.

Length of time until release

As discussed in the methodology section of Chapter 1, the prison sample was skewed towards prisoners due to be released within the five-month period following survey fieldwork, to ensure a sufficient sample of women for re-interview in the follow-up survey to be conducted in 1999. With respect to this characteristic, therefore, the survey data will not be representative of the national female prison population.

Two-thirds of the initial sample (65%) were due to be released within six months of their interview. A further fifth (20%) were due for release within two years, and 16 per cent were not due for release until a minimum of two further years. Full details are in Table 2.10 below.

Table 2.10: Length of sentence remaining at time of interview

Base: all prison respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	557
Weighted base:	557*
	%
Up to 1 month	19
More than 1, up to 3 months	25
More than 3, up to 6 months	21
More than 6 months, up to 1 year	9
More than 1 year, up to 2 years	11
More than 2 years, up to 5 years	13
More than 5 years	2

* Base excludes ten cases where sentence length and/or release date were not recorded.

3 Pre-prison employment and education history

In this chapter, we explore the baseline level of work experience, skills, education and training women had before beginning their prison sentence. The results in this chapter are based on the 567 female inmates interviewed in the initial prison survey.

Employment in 12 months before prison sentence

Employment status at time of imprisonment

Three in ten women were working either full- or part-time in the period immediately before starting their sentence. The principal reasons for not working were unemployment (33% of the sample) and looking after the home or family (18%). Three per cent had been in education or training and eight per cent admitted that they were living from crime or prostitution.

Compared with the national female population of 18- to 34-year-olds, inmates were less than half as likely to be working (the national figure is 67%).[11] However, this comparison is not strictly valid, given that some women may have changed their economic status in preparation for prison, for example by giving up a job or a course of education or training. Table 3.1 displays the survey results by age and presence of children.

11 Labour Market Trends, October 1998.

Table 3.1: Employment status at time of imprisonment

Base: all prison respondents

		Age			Children	
	Total	18–20	21–29	30–40	Dependent children	No dependent children
Unweighted base:	567	66	269	229	371	196
Weighted base:	567	61	274	229	375	192
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Working full-time (30+ hrs)	20	25	19	19	14	32
Working part-time (<30 hrs)	10	11	8	12	12	8
All working	30	36	27	31	26	40
Unempl. and seeking work	12	21	13	9	10	15
Unempl. and not seeking work	21	16	26	17	21	21
Looking after home/family	18	13	15	23	27	*
Caring for relative/other	*	–	*	*	–	1
Full-time education/training	2	4	2	1	2	1
Part-time education/training	1	1	1	1	1	1
Long-term sick/disabled	7	3	6	8	5	9
Living off crime/prostitution	8	3	9	8	7	9
Other	1	3	*	1	1	1
All not working	70	64	73	69	74	60

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data in three cases.

Working status was strongly related to presence of children. Around a quarter of inmates with dependent children had been working at this stage, compared with 40 per cent of those without.

Young offenders (aged 18 to 20) were the most likely to have been working at the time of imprisonment. Around a third (36%) had a job at this stage compared with 27 per cent of 21– to 29– year-olds and 31 per cent of 30– to 40-year-olds. This is naturally correlated with presence of children.

All employment in 12 months before sentence

Although only three in ten women were in work at the time of imprisonment, the proportion who had had any job in the 12 months before prison rose to 44 per cent. Young offenders were the most likely to have been employed during this period: 64 per cent had some form of work compared with 38 per cent and 42 per cent respectively of 21– to 29– and 30– to 40– year-olds. Black respondents were also more likely to have worked (62% compared with 40% of white respondents).

Just over a third (37%) of women with children had worked during this period, rising to 59 per cent of those without.

Details of jobs held in this period

In this section, we look at the nature of jobs held by respondents in the 12 months before start of sentence. As stated above, 44 per cent of inmates had held at least one job in this period.

As shown in Table 3.2, the vast majority (87%) of respondents working during this period had been an employee in their most recent job, and 75 per cent described their job status as permanent rather than temporary or fixed-contract.

Jobs tended to be relatively short-term. A quarter (26%) of jobs held had lasted for less than six months. A third (34%) had been held for at least two years.

Table 3.2: Status of most recent job held in previous 12 months[12]

Base: all prison respondents with job in 12 months before sentence

	Total
Unweighted base:	263
Weighted base:	256
	%
Employee	87
Self-employed	12
Permanent	75
Temporary/casual	20
Fixed contract	2
Don't know	2
Length of time job held:	
Less than 3 months	12
3 months, less than 6 months	14
6 months, less than 1 year	25
1 year, less than 2 years	14
2 years, less than 5 years	18
5 years or more	16

Attitudes towards employment

Respondents who had worked in the 12 months prior to their sentence were asked how important they considered it was for them to have a job. The large majority (92%) considered this to be important, 78 per cent "very" important.

When asked why they considered this to be the case, the main reasons given were financial (58% of those considering work to be important), for independence/social reasons (21%) and to relieve boredom, have "something to do" (20%). Around one in ten (9%) mentioned career ambitions as a reason for working.

12 "Jobs" may have included prostitution or other illegal forms of work. It was left up to respondents to define what they regarded as a "job".

Table 3.3 displays the full set of responses.

Table 3.3: Why respondents consider that having a job is important

Base: all prison respondents in work during 12 months before prison who considered work important

	Total
Unweighted base:	254
Weighted base:	245
	%
Money/pay bills/support family	58
Independence/get out of house/social side	21
Keep busy/something to do/relieve boredom	20
Just wanted to work	11
Experience/career/achievement/goals/aims	9
To help support parents/boyfriend/husband	9
Keep from crime	9
Self esteem/piece of mind	8
To get off Jobseekers' Allowance/benefit	5
To take mind off case/keep sane	3
To earn money for college/travelling	2
Other	5
Don't know	2

Respondents could give more than one reason so percentages total more than 100.

Some actual responses given by inmates to illustrate some of these themes:

"Kept me out of trouble. It was good to get up in the morning, get on the bus, and meet people regularly...I didn't need drugs to push things to the back of my mind"

"It keeps up your self-esteem and teaches you skills. Everybody should have a job"

"Because it was good for my morale – it just kept me sane"

"I felt more grown up and independent. I felt like I was going somewhere in life".

Job seeking activity in 12 months before sentence

Just over half (56%) of respondents had not worked at all in the 12 months preceding their prison sentence. This sub-group was asked if they had looked for work in this period; only a fifth (20%) said they had.

The large majority of these job seekers considered that finding work should be a priority, with 82per cent of them saying that finding a job was of importance.

However, job seeking had clearly been difficult, with over four-fifths (81%) of those who had been seeking work in this period saying that they had difficulty. The main reasons for this difficulty stemmed from a previous criminal record (34% of those experiencing difficulty), from lack of qualifications (27%), or because of problems affording or arranging childcare (18%).

For example:

> *"I had no qualifications in catering. I would have taken anything...but I had to tell people that I had criminal convictions even though I hadn't been to prison before"*
>
> *"The work I wanted to do* [painting and decorating] *you had to have certificates. It was hard because I was a woman"*
>
> *"I had two kids so I had to work around them"*
>
> *"I have been a full time mum for 7 years and who wants to employ a mum who has never worked?"*
>
> *"It's just harder to find work when you have a drug problem".*

Total employment experience before prison

Although only about two-fifths of the women interviewed had worked in the 12 months preceding their sentence, the large majority had worked at some stage before prison – 82 per cent in total. However, for some this work experience had been a long time ago.

Table 3.4 displays the distribution of length of time elapsed between the last job held and start of sentence. The median time interval fell between two and five years. However a quarter of respondents (23%) had not worked for at least five years, and a fifth (18%) had never worked at all.

This clearly varies by age. As many as a third (33%) of inmates aged 30 or over had not worked for at least five years, and one in eight (13%) had not worked at all. Among 21- to 29-year-olds, a fifth (20%) have not worked in five years, and 23 per cent have never worked. Therefore, about half of all women aged 21 to 40 had had no work experience within the previous five years. Among the young offender group (aged 18 to 20), this figure is 20 per cent.

Table 3.4: Length of time between leaving last job and starting sentence; by age

Base: all prison respondents

	Total	Age group 18–20	21–29	30–40
Unweighted base:	567	66	269	229
Weighted base:	567	61	274	229
	%	%	%	%
Immediately before	30	36	26	31
Up to 6 months before	6	20	5	4
6 months, up to 1 year before	6	5	8	3
1 year up to 2 years before	6	11	6	4
2 years up to 5 years before	11	8	11	13
5 years up to 10 years before	13	–	16	13
10 years before or more	10	–	4	19
Can't remember	1	–	2	1
Never worked	18	20	23	13

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data on three cases.

Job details of all jobs held

As discussed above, 82 per cent of the women interviewed had held a job at some stage in their life, even if this was a long time ago. Table 3.5 displays the socio-economic group of the most recently held job, regardless of how long ago this was. The comparative data for the general female population is shown alongside.

Table 3.5: Socio-economic group status of most recent job

Base: all prison respondents with job before sentence*

	Survey sample	Population**
Unweighted base:	213	8,137
Weighted base:	213	–
	%	%
Professional, employers and managers	4	11
Intermediate and junior non-manual	34	50
Skilled manual	10	9
Semi-skilled manual and personal service	44	23
Unskilled manual	8	8

* Base excludes cases where socio-economic group was not able to be coded from respondent's answer.
** Based on all women aged 16 and over. Source: General Household Survey 1996.

The distribution of jobs held is biased towards manual work (62% against 38% non-manual). Nearly half had worked in semi-skilled manual occupations. Compared with the national population, the skill level of women's jobs was lower.

The position with regard to last paid job is similar to that of jobs held in the 12 months before sentence. Nine in ten respondents who had ever worked, worked as an employee in their latest job, and seven in ten worked on a permanent basis. Jobs tended to be short-term with around half lasting less than one year. Full details are given in Table 3.6.

Table 3.6: Status of most recent job

Base: all prison respondents with job before prison sentence

	Total
Unweighted base:	466
Weighted base:	466
	%
Employee	90
Self-employed	10
Permanent	72
Temporary/casual	23
Fixed contract	4
Length of time job held:	
Less than 6 months	26
6 months, less than 1 year	24
1 year, less than 2 years	15
2 years, less than 5 years	20
5 years or more	14

Work skills before sentence

Two-fifths (42%) of respondents considered that they had some specific work skills before starting their sentence, and this proportion did not vary by age. Those who held at least one qualification were significantly more likely to consider that they had work skills compared to those without any (67% compared to 25%).

When asked to describe these previously-held skills, a range of responses was given. However, the most common types of skills were clerical/administration (26%), retail (17%) or computing/word processing (12%). Catering and accounts/book-keeping were the next most commonly-held skills. Details are in Table 3.7.

Table 3.7: Work skills before sentence

Base: all prison respondents who had work skills before sentence

	Total
Unweighted base:	241
Weighted base:	236
	%
Clerical/admin/secretarial/business	26
Retail/marketing/customer relations	17
Computing/VDU/WP	12
Catering/food preparation	11
Accounts/book-keeping	10
Hairdressing/beauty	8
Nursing	7
Sewing machinist	7
Child-care/nursery nurse	6
Care of elderly/disabled	5
Waitressing	4
Sports/gym	3
Painting and decorating	3
Other	20

Respondents could give more than one example, so total percentage exceeds 100.

Longest period of continuous employment

Respondents were asked for the longest time they had spent *continuously* in paid work. The median time period fell in the range of one to two years. Aside from the 18 per cent who had never worked, nearly a quarter (22%) had not worked continuously for longer than a year. Around a fifth (19%) had had continuous employment of at least five years.

The results are shown in Table 3.8 by age. Among 21– to 29-year-olds, one in seven (15%) had had stable employment for at least five years, rising to 30 per cent among those aged 30 and over.

Table 3.8: Longest period of continuous employment; by age

Base: all prison respondents

	Total	Age group 18–20	21–29	30–40
Unweighted base:	567	66	269	229
Weighted base:	567	61	274	229
	%	%	%	%
Never worked	18	20	22	13
Less than 6 months	11	28	9	7
6 months, less than 1 year	11	15	15	6
1 year, less than 2 years	14	16	16	11
2 years, less than 5 years	25	20	22	31
5 years, less than 10 years	13	2	12	18
10 years or more	6	–	2	12
Can't remember	2	2	1	2

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data.

Education history

Age left school

The large majority of respondents (74%) had left school at 15 or 16. One in nine (11%) had attended school longer. Adult offenders were over twice as likely to have remained at school after 16 compared with young offenders (13% and 5% respectively).

Further education

A little over a third of respondents (37%) had had some form of further education between leaving school and starting their custodial sentence. For the majority of these inmates, this was experienced at a college of Higher or Further Education, or a technical college. Four per cent of the entire sample had attended a university or polytechnic.

Black respondents were twice as likely to have attended some form of further education compared to white respondents (63% and 31% respectively). The distribution based on the whole sample is given in Table 3.9.

Table 3.9: Further education between school and sentence

Base: all prison respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	567
Weighted base:	567
	%
Any	37
University/polytechnic	4
College of Higher Education	5
College of Further Education	19
Technical college	5
Hairdressing/secretarial college /YTS	2
Correspondence course	*
Other type of establishment	2

On-the-job training and government schemes

A fifth (21%) of respondents had been on some form of government training scheme. Black respondents were nearly twice as likely to have done so as white respondents (31% compared with 18%).

One in six (17%) of all respondents had received some form of on-the-job training or apprenticeship.

Qualifications obtained before prison

Two-fifths (39%) of respondents had obtained at least one qualification prior to beginning their sentence. This is half the proportion found among the equivalent age group in the national population (82%).[13]

Table 3.10 displays the highest qualification level obtained, compared with national statistics among women of a similar age group (16 to 39). The lower educational achievement of women inmates compared with the equivalent national population is striking.

It is worth noting that, consistent with findings described elsewhere in this chapter, black inmates were shown to have a better record of pre-prison qualifications compared with white respondents (50% of black respondents compared with 36% of white respondents holding at least one qualification).

Table 3.10 Highest qualification obtained before prison

Base: all prison respondents

	Survey sample	Population*
Unweighted base:	567	3,088
Weighted base:	567	–
	%	%
Degree or equivalent	2	12
Higher education below degree level	1	9
GCE 'A' level or equivalent	5	15
GCSE or equivalent	24	45
Overseas qualification/other	8	2
No qualifications	61	18

* Based on women aged 16 to 39, General Household Survey 1996.

Table 3.11 displays the full range of qualifications obtained before start of sentence by age of inmate. It is clear that, even when taking all qualifications into consideration, inmates' baseline educational status before starting their prison sentence is low. Around a fifth had GCSE level qualifications, although less than 10 per cent of the sample had any one specific form of qualification.

13 Based on women aged 16 to 39. Source: General Household Survey 1996

Table 3.11: All qualifications obtained before start of sentence

Base: all prison respondents

	Total	Age group 18–20	21–29	30–40
Unweighted base:	567	66	269	229
Weighted base:	567	61	274	229
	%	%	%	%
Any	39	31	39	40
Degree/higher degree	2	–	1	2
A-levels or equivalent	4	–	4	5
GCSE or equivalent	21	20	20	23
RSA/Pitmans/other clerical or commercial qualification	8	7	7	10
City and Guilds	7	3	8	7
ONC/BEC/TEC/BTEC General	3	–	5	1
HNC/BEC/TEC/BTEC Higher	1	–	1	1
NVQ(Level 1, 2 or 3)	7	7	7	6
Overseas qualification	*	–	–	1
Other	8	8	8	8

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data for three cases.

It is worth noting that one in seven respondents (14%) lacked both work experience and qualifications before beginning their sentence. This group was mainly characterised by women with dependent children, who formed 75 per cent of this subset.

4 Prison work

This chapter covers the work experience of inmates during their sentence, job preferences, attitudes towards the prison work provided and perceptions of the usefulness of this work in helping to equip them for employment on release.

The majority of respondents (70%) had served at least part of their sentence in other prisons before their current spell of imprisonment. Half (48%) of inmates with short sentences of up to a year had served time in more than one prison during their sentence, rising to 86 per cent of inmates with sentences of at least four years.

In this chapter we look at the custodial experiences of inmates both in relation to their current spell of imprisonment, as well as their experiences across the whole of their sentence to date. The results are based on the 567 inmates interviewed during the first survey.

Nature of prison work

Three-quarters (74%) of respondents were doing paid work at the time of interview. The majority of the remainder were doing a full-time course of education or training. However, a small number of inmates had other reasons for not working. Ten percent of those not in work said this was due to health problems, seven per cent because they were due for release soon, six per cent because there were no current vacancies, and five per cent said it was due to bad behaviour.

Eighty-six per cent of inmates had had at least one prison job at their current prison, with half of these having done at least two jobs. The mean number of jobs held was six.

When looking at prisoners' experiences across the whole of their sentence, the proportion who have held at least one job rises to 92 per cent.

Type of work

Prisoners were asked to describe their current job, or if not currently in work, their most recently held job at that prison. Details are shown in Table 4.1.

The most common prison jobs were those that involved helping to run and maintain the prison – for example cleaning (24%), kitchens/serving (16%) and gardening (16%). Relatively few women were involved in work which served the needs of the outside. The most common outside-related jobs were sewing/machinist jobs (11%) or assembly/packing (10%). The type of work done did not seem to vary by age of inmate, sentence length or regime level. Inmates across all circumstances were doing a similar pattern of work.

Table 4.1: Type of work: current or most recent job at current prison

Base: all prison respondents who have worked at current prison

	Total
Unweighted base:	485
Weighted base:	489
	%
Cleaner	24
Kitchens/serving	16
Gardening/Farm work	16
Sewing/machinist	11
Assembly/packing	10
Admin/office work	5
Laundry	3
Carpentry/electrician/plumber	3
Painting/decorating	2
Other	14

Very few women were doing any work which involved recognised vocational training. Only one in ten (9%) were doing some form of on-the-job training for a qualification as part of their work, although this rose to 18 per cent among working prisoners serving sentences of at least four years. The jobs which most commonly involved training were kitchen work (13% doing training), and machinist work (21%). All seven respondents working as a hairdresser were training for a qualification.

Working conditions

Inmates worked within the prison grounds in the large majority of cases, although ten per cent worked at least part of the time on the outside.

Most women with jobs were working on a full-time basis – 63% worked for a minimum of 26 hours a week. The mean number of hours worked was 29. The job which involved the longest hours was kitchen/serving work, where the mean number of hours worked was 36. Table 4.2 shows details of the women's usual weekly hours worked.

Table 4.2: Usual weekly hours: current or most recent job at current prison

Base: all prison respondents who have worked at current prison

	Total
Unweighted base:	485
Weighted base:	489
	%
1–10	8
11–15	6
16–20	8
21–25	15
26–30	22
31–40	30
41+	11
Mean no. of hours	29

The large majority of women (70%) claimed to be earning a weekly wage of less than £10. Earnings of any more than £15 were uncommon; only eight per cent claimed to be earning this level. The estimated mean weekly wage was £10.

There was some correlation between hours worked and pay. The estimated mean weekly earnings for jobs of up to 25 hours per week was £8, this rising to £11 for jobs involving a minimum of 26 hours a week. Table 4.3 gives a breakdown of usual weekly pay.

Table 4.3: Usual weekly pay: current or most recent job at current prison

Base: all prison respondents who have worked at current prison

	Total
Unweighted base:	485
Weighted base:	489
	%
Up to £6	23
£7–£9	47
£10–£12	17
£13–£15	4
£16–£19	3
£20 or more	5

Job preferences

Choice of occupation

Two-thirds (65%) of women interviewed who had worked at their current prison said they had had some degree of choice in the work they did. Those sub-groups most likely to have had a choice were inmates serving longer sentences of at least four years (67% compared with 59% serving up to one year), inmates aged at least 30 (69% compared with 58% of young offenders), and those on the enhanced regime (71% compared with 59% on basic/standard). There was also a difference by ethnic group, with white respondents claiming more choice (67%) compared to black respondents (58%).

Respondents given a choice were asked why they chose that particular job. Common reasons were simply that the job was perceived as enjoyable (25%), it gave the inmate a chance to work outside (17%), it gave them useful experience (13%), or because the money was good (12%). Details are given in Table 4.4.

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Table 4.4: Reasons for choosing a particular job

Base: all prison respondents who had choice in type of work

	Total
Unweighted base:	319
Weighted base:	317
	%
Enjoyable/interesting	25
Work outside	17
For the experience	13
Money/bonus	12
Keep busy/pass the time	10
Did not like previous job	8
Previous experience	7
Gets you outside prison grounds	5
Social/meeting others	5
Physically active	4
Being trusted	4
Other	12

Respondents could give more than one reason so percentages total more than 100.

Some examples of actual responses are given below:

"Because of the perks. You're unlocked throughout the day. It's busy .... good working hours, even weekends, helps kills the boredom"

"It gives you you're self-esteem and makes you feel that you can be trusted"

"I wanted to get off the wing and I wanted to associate with different people"

"Because I found it a more stable career and I could work my way up. I can carry on with my NVQ outside and do this type of work"

Which jobs are preferred?

Overall, 32 per cent of respondents who had been working at the prison said that there

were other jobs available that they would have preferred to do. Younger respondents were particularly likely to be dissatisfied with their current job, with 45 per cent of them wanting something different. The most sought-after jobs among those preferring something different were gardening (27%) and kitchens/serving (17%). Painting/decorating, gym/sports work and farm work were also relatively popular (around one in ten mentioning each). Table 4.5 shows which prison jobs were preferred by respondents.

Table 4.5: Which jobs were preferred by respondents

Base: all working respondents who would prefer different job

	Total
Unweighted base:	156
Weighted base:	156
	%
Gardening	27
Kitchens/serving	17
Painter/Decorator	9
Gym/sports	8
Farm work	8
Carpenter/electrician/plumber	7
Admin/office work	6
Sewing/machinist	5
Hairdressing	5
Cleaning	5
Other	29

Respondents could give more than one reason so percentages total more than 100.

Total work experience during sentence

Taking into account their experience across the whole of their sentence to date, Table 4.6 displays the full list of jobs held by women. In this context, it is clear that women's work experience has been confined mainly to those jobs which assist in the running and maintenance of the prison. Cleaning was by far the most common job, with over a third (36%) of all inmates having done this at some stage during their sentence. In fact nearly half (46%) of women serving sentences of at least four years had worked in these positions.

Kitchens (24%) and gardening (20%) were the next in line. Around one in eight had worked as a machinist during their sentence, and a similar proportion had worked in assembly or packing. Very small proportions of women had done any other specific type of job.

In total, 16 per cent had done at least one job which had involved vocational training leading to a qualification. Therefore, this implies that the work experience and training/education opportunities available to women (detailed in Chapter 5) are mainly kept separate; there is little integration of the two.

Table 4.6: Type of work carried out: all jobs held during sentence

Base: all prison respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	567
Weighted base:	567
	%
Cleaner	36
Kitchens/serving	24
Gardening/farm work	20
Sewing/machinist	13
Assembly/packing	13
Admin/office work	6
Laundry	6
Painting/decorating	4
Gym/swimming pool	4
Carpentry/electrician/plumber	4
Hairdressing	3
Other	15

Respondents may have held more than one job during their sentence ,so percentages total more than 100.

Use of prior skills

As discussed in Chapter 3 (section on *Work skills before sentence*), two-fifths (42%) of respondents considered themselves to have a work skill prior to beginning their sentence – and these skills tended towards clerical, retail or IT (see Table 3.7).

However, the majority of inmates with prior skills had not had the opportunity to put these skills to use, or to build on them, during their sentence. Only a quarter (24%) of inmates with a prior skill had had such a chance. For 29 per cent of the 157 inmates who had not used prior skills, such work was offered at the prison but they had not had the opportunity to do it. However, the main reason for being denied the use of these skills was simply that the right type of work was not available. Just under a half (45%) of all inmates with a prior skill said that no job had been available where they could have used it. This highlights the imbalance between the type of work held on the outside and the work available to women within prisons.

Attitudes towards prison work

Attitudes towards purpose of prison work

Respondents were asked for their agreement or disagreement with a number of statements designed to gauge respondents' views about the purpose of prison work. Their responses are summarised in Table 4.7.

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Table 4.7: Agreement with statements about purpose of prison work: percentage agreeing

Base: all prison respondents

		Age group			Ethnicity	
	Total	18–20	21–29	30–39	White	Black
Unweighted base:	567	66	269	229	445	91
Weighted base:	567	61	274	229	455	83
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Prison work...						
..is only provided to stop some inmates from causing trouble	44	43	46	42	45	42
..is provided to give inmates new skills which can help them get a job after release	59	72	56	58	62	53
..is provided to train inmates in a working routine which could help them get a job after release	69	74	71	65	70	66
..uses inmates as cheap labour	77	78	76	79	76	80
..can be used as punishment	34	36	36	32	33	40
..is provided to give inmates time out of the cell, to give them something to do	88	89	88	88	89	87

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data in three cases.

The majority of inmates believed that prison work was provided to help inmates improve their chances on release, even if they did not necessarily believe that it would help them personally (see the section later in this chapter on *Perceptions of how useful prison work will be for release*). Three-fifths (59%) agreed that work was provided to give inmates new skills, and seven in ten (69%) believed that it offered a working routine which could help inmates get a job on release. Agreement to these statements varied by age, with young offenders being more positive about these aspects of prison work compared with older offenders.

It is also interesting to note that prisoners with no previous work skills or qualifications were more likely to believe that prison work was beneficial in terms of helping them on release. Sixty-four per cent of those who lacked work skills believed that prison work helped inmates to learn new skills, compared with 52 per cent of those who already held skills. The differential between those with and without qualifications is similar (62% of those without qualifications agreeing compared with 55% of those with).

Nearly all inmates (88%) believed that one of the purposes of prison work is to give inmates time out of the cell, and this did not vary by age. However, there was some cynicism towards the purpose of prison work, with the large majority (77%) agreeing that the prison uses the inmates as cheap labour, and this again was consistent by age.

It was a minority of inmates who agreed that prison work was only provided to stop some inmates from causing trouble, and that prison work was sometimes used as a form of punishment.

It is of interest to note that inmates from ethnic minority groups were less positive about prison work, as measured by each of these statements (see Table 4.7). Given that black respondents have been shown to possess a better pre-prison record of work experience and qualifications compared with white respondents (see Chapter 3), it is possibly for this reason that they are more disillusioned with prison work.

Attitudes towards benefits of prison work

Prisoners were asked a series of questions designed to discover to what extent prisoners considered they had benefited from prison work across a number of aspects.

Table 4.8: Agreement with statements about benefits of prison work

Base: all prison respondents who have worked during sentence

	Total	Age group 18–20	21–29	30–39
Unweighted base:	518	56	244	215
Weighted base:	519	52	250	214
	%	%	%	%
Prison work has helped you learn to work regular hours	51	60	53	46
Prison work has helped you learn to take the orders from the boss at work	46	49	46	44
Prison work has helped you learn to work with other people	59	71	59	54
Prison work has helped you take more responsibility	52	62	55	46
You have done good quality work	77	69	76	79
You have found the work interesting	53	50	50	56

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data in three cases.

Around half of all inmates agreed that prison work had helped them learn to work regular hours, take orders from the boss and to take more responsibility. Around half said that they found the work interesting, and the majority (77%) considered that their work was of good quality.

Younger respondents were generally more positive about how prison work had helped them. Compared with adults, young offenders were more likely to agree that prison work had helped them develop a working routine, either in terms of working hours, taking orders, working with others, or taking on responsibility. However older offenders were more likely to have taken pride in their work, 79 per cent agreeing that their work was of good quality compared with 69 per cent of young offenders.

Inmates without any previous work experience were particularly likely to consider that prison work had helped them develop a working routine; 63 per cent of this sub-group considered that prison work had helped them learn regular hours compared with 48 per cent of those who had already worked. There were similar differentials with respect to taking orders (58% and 43% respectively), working with others (73% and 56%) and taking more responsibility (63% and 49%).

Perceptions of how helpful prison work will be for release

Half (48%) of all prisoners who have worked at some stage during their sentence considered that the work had helped them develop new work skills. This did not vary by age. However, those with longer sentences of over four years were more likely to agree (54%) compared with those serving sentences of up to a year (43%).

There was a differential in terms of the level of previous skill and experience: 44 per cent of those with previous qualifications considered that they had learnt new work skills compared with 50 per cent of those without any. Those who already considered themselves to have work skills before coming to prison were less likely to consider that they had learnt anything new (41% compared with 52% of those without prior skills).

The extent to which prisoners considered that they had learnt new work skills varied by regime type. Just over half of enhanced regime prisoners (53%) had this view compared with 43 per cent of standard/basic regime prisoners.

Those who mentioned that they had learnt new skills were asked what they had learnt. The main findings are summarised in Table 4.9. Gardening and sewing/tailoring skills were the most frequently mentioned by this sub-group (21% and 19%). One in six (16%) mentioned learning trade skills such as carpentry/painting/decorating/electrical skills, etc. Other skills mentioned were catering/ nutrition (15%), business/admin/IT (13%), machine operation (10%), and health and safety/hygiene (10%). One in six (16%) mentioned more general work skills such as confidence/team working, social skills, etc.

Table 4.9: New work skills learnt as a result of prison work

Base: all prison respondents who consider they have learnt new skills through prison work

	Total
Unweighted base:	248
Weighted base:	248
	%
Gardening	21
Sewing/tailoring/upholstery/furnishing	19
Carpentry/painting and decorating/ building/ electrical/plumbing	16
Confidence/team-working/social/life skills	16
Cooking/nutrition	15
Business/admin/IT	13
Machinery operation	10
Health and safety/first aid/hygiene	10
Hairdressing/beauty	7
Art/craft	6
Gym/sports	5
Other	8

Respondents may have learned more than one new skill so percentages total more than 100.

However, inmates who considered themselves to have learnt new work skills did not necessarily think that these would help equip them for a job on release. In total, 29 per cent of inmates who had worked during their sentence considered that their prison work experience would help them get a job on release. Even among those who considered themselves to have learnt new work skills at prison, only half (50%) thought that this work would help them get a job on release.

The extent to which prisoners felt that prison work would better their chances of employment on release varied by sentence length. Inmates serving long sentences of over four years were more likely to consider that their prison experience will help them (39% compared with 28% of those sentenced to one to four years, and 19% of those serving sentences of up to a year). However, this view did not vary by previous work experience. Those who had no previous work experience were as likely to consider that prison work would help them on release as those with such experience.

Inmates on an enhanced regime had a higher propensity to view prison work as useful for release, with 35 per cent having this view compared with 24 per cent on basic or standard regime level.

The 150 inmates in the sample who viewed their prison work experience as potentially helpful for release were asked which jobs they thought this applied to. The pattern of responses given did not necessarily correspond with the jobs that had been mostly held. For example, although the most common job held by prisoners was cleaning, very few considered that this would help them on release. The jobs considered to be the most useful were kitchens and sewing/machinist work. The full list is shown in Table 4.10.

Table 4.10: Prison jobs considered helpful for release

Base: all prison respondents who consider that prison work will help them get a job on release

	Total
Unweighted base:	150
Weighted base:	150
	%
Kitchens/serving	24
Sewing/machinist	18
Gardening	10
Cleaner	9
Admin/office work	9
Hairdressing	9
Gym/sports	8
Painting/decorating	7
Other	15

Respondents could name more than one type of work so the percentages total more than 100.

As discussed above, 71 per cent of inmates who had worked during their sentence to date did not consider that this experience would help them increase their employment chances on release. This sub-group of 348 inmates was asked why they thought this to be the case. The most common answer (34%) was simply that they did not want to continue with this type of work when they left prison. However, a quarter (27%) said that the work was too menial/lacked in skill or was simply an extension of housework, and one in seven (15%) said that the job did not teach them any new skills, only ones which they already had. Full details are contained in Table 4.11.

Table 4.11 Why respondents did not consider that prison work would help them get a job on release

Base: all prison respondents who consider that prison work will not help them get a job on release

	Total
Unweighted base:	348
Weighted base:	351
	%
Do not want that type of job	34
Work too menial/lacking in skill/extension of housework	27
Already had skills/didn't learn anything new	15
Not relevant to real jobs	9
Because of criminal record	9
No qualification awarded	8
Have better experience/qualifications in another field	5
Other	15

Respondents could name more than one reason, so the percentages total more than 100.

Some actual responses given by inmates are provided below for illustration:

"Well, the work that we do is not possible to do outside. The only people who do this work [assembling light fittings] is prisoners. How can I sit in an interview and say this is what I learnt in prison without them thinking I'm stupid?"

"Because the work I am doing is very tedious. I am stuck in laundry waiting for trolley loads of clothes to come from the dryers and then I fold them ...that is what I do every day. That will not help me get a job on release. A housewife does that"

"The jobs in prison are a case of just throwing people in because there is nothing else for them to do. I feel the officers get sick of having to retrain people and they can't be bothered to teach you the job properly"

"They don't give you certificates, like if you work in the kitchen you can't do your Health and Hygiene"

"Re-sponging headphones. How is that going to help me? It's not training me for anything, is it?"

"Because it's just prison labour, just helping to maintain the prison. It is not a skillful job or nothing. The jobs I have done are not like jobs on the outside"

"Although I use an industrial sewing machine, the hours are not long enough and you are not pushed hard enough to work in a factory".

5 Prison education and training

This chapter describes the educational and vocational training courses taken by prisoners while in prison, and what qualifications they have obtained as result of these. The chapter also covers the accessibility of courses to inmates, and identifies areas where the Prison Service could do more to meet inmates' needs.

Courses undertaken

Respondents were asked about the types of courses they had undertaken while at prison. See Table 5.1.

A third of prisoners had undertaken offending behaviour courses, which would have included personal development courses such as social or life skills, drugs or alcohol misuse, offender treatment programmes etc. This was particularly common among prisoners serving sentences for more serious crimes: a half of prisoners serving sentences of over four years has attended such courses compared with 17 per cent of prisoners serving up to a year.

Two-fifths of inmates had attended educational/vocational courses which ultimately led to a qualification, and a fifth had attended other non-qualification courses. A small proportion (7%) had undertaken their own private correspondence course.

In total, just over half (54%) had taken at least one educational/vocational course (this does not include offending behaviour courses). Younger respondents and those serving long sentences were the sub-groups who were most likely to have had this opportunity. Black respondents were also more likely than average to have taken courses. Three-fifths (59%) of black respondents had taken courses leading to a qualification, and 17 per cent had undertaken their own private study.

Nearly half (46%) had not done any courses, of whom half (52%), when asked, would have liked to have the opportunity to do so. Thus a quarter of all respondents had lacked the opportunity to do courses which they would have liked to have done.

Those who had not taken courses and did not want to were asked why. The main reasons given by this sub-group were that their sentence was insufficiently long (22%), they had no interest in the courses on offer (20%), the courses were not considered useful (12%), or they already considered themselves to have sufficient qualifications (10%).

Table 5.1: Courses undertaken at current prison

Base: all prison respondents

		Age group			Sentence length		
	Total	18–20	21–29	30–39	Up to 1 year	1–4 years	>4 years
Unweighted base:	567	66	269	229	119	294	149
Weighted base:	567	61	274	229	125	293	144
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Offending behaviour courses	35	33	34	36	17	36	47
Educational/vocational courses leading to qualification	41	53	41	38	24	43	54
Educational/vocational courses not leading to qualification	22	27	23	21	18	24	20
Correspondence course/private study	7	1	6	10	2	6	15
Any educational/ vocational courses*	54	67	55	50	37	57	63

* Excludes offender behaviour courses. Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data on three cases.

Prisoners were asked separately about the courses they had undertaken in the prison they were serving time in at the time of interview, and the courses they had taken in other prisons as part of their sentence. Once the whole sentence is taken into account, 62 per cent had taken some form of educational or vocational course.

Table 5.2 shows which courses had been undertaken at their current prison and in total throughout their sentence.

The most common courses were IT/computer courses, English and art/craft/music. Around one in eight had undertaken at some point during their sentence catering/food hygiene courses, maths, typing/WP and hairdressing.

Table 5.2: Courses undertaken at current prison and throughout the sentence

Base: all prison respondents

	a) Current prison	b) Whole sentence
Unweighted base:	567	567
Weighted base:	567	567
	%	%
Any	54	62
IT/computer studies	16	20
English	16	22
Music/art/drama/craft	13	17
Cookery/catering/hygiene	11	13
Maths	10	14
Typing/WP/DTP	10	13
Business studies	7	8
Hairdressing/beauty	7	10
Health and social care	6	8
Life skills/housekeeping/ childcare	4	4
Knitting/sewing/needlework	3	3
Fashion design	3	4
Basic skills (numeracy/literacy)	3	3
Other	11	12

Prisoners were asked about the number of hours spent weekly in their current or most recent spell of education/training (see Table 5.3). Around a third were spending up to ten hours a week on courses, nearly half (46%) spending a minimum of 21 hours. The mean number of hours spent was 18. Young offenders on courses were spending more time on average in education (22 hours).

Table 5.3: Usual weekly hours: current or most recent spell of education at current prison

Base: all prison respondents who have done courses at current prison

	Total
Unweighted base:	303
Weighted base:	299
	%
1–5	22
6–10	10
11–15	8
16–20	13
21–25	19
26–30	16
31+	11
Mean number of hours	18

Courses to help with literacy and numeracy

Around one in ten prisoners (9%) acknowledged experiencing difficulty either speaking, reading or writing in English, 6 per cent admitted trouble working with numbers, and 12 per cent admitted problems with either. These figures are significantly lower than the published figures based on basic skills assessment screening tests. The 1997 Prison Statistics classified 19 per cent of female inmates as below level 1 literacy, and 26 per cent as below level 1 numeracy, where level 1 is roughly equivalent to GCSE standard and indicates the need for remedial help. This suggests that many inmates in our sample were either understating their problem, or that they did not consider their level to represent a "problem".

A half (46%) of the 53 inmates acknowledging literacy problems said that they had attended a course to help them with this at some point during their sentence. Of the 36 inmates admitting to numeracy problems, 39 per cent said that they had received help. This would indicate a greater need for help targeted specifically at these sub-groups.

Qualifications obtained or working towards

Table 5.4 displays the qualifications which a) had been obtained by respondents by the time of the interview and b) were either obtained or being worked towards. This includes qualifications obtained across the whole of their sentence, in all prisons in which they had served time.

A third of respondents had obtained at least one qualification by the time of interview. These qualifications were almost solely vocational. NVQs were the most common form of qualification (11% of all respondents), and these were mainly studied at levels I or II (semi-skilled level). This was followed by clerical qualifications such as RSA or Pitmans (9%). Only two per cent of respondents had obtained an academic qualification such as GCSE or A-level.

However, a larger proportion of respondents were working towards a qualification, even if they had not obtained one yet. A little under half (46%) had either obtained or were in the process of working towards a qualification. Again, these were predominantly NVQ levels I or II, or clerical qualifications. The proportions aiming towards academic qualifications were extremely low: three per cent had obtained/were working towards a GCSE, one per cent an A-level and two per cent were working towards a degree.

Table 5.4: Qualifications a) obtained and b) either obtained or worked towards during sentence

Base: all prison respondents

	a) Obtained	b) Obtained or working towards
Unweighted base:	567	567
Weighted base:	567	567
	%	%
Any**	29	46
Degree	*	2
'A' level(s)	1	1
GCSE(s)	1	3
City and Guilds	5	8
RSA/Pitmans/other clerical/ commercial qualification	9	12
NVQ Level III/GNVQ Advanced	2	2
NVQ Level II/GNVQ Intermediate	4	12
NVQ Level I/GNVQ Foundation	7	13
NVQ/GNVQ (level not known)	1	3
Any NVQ	11	26
Health and Hygiene/Health and Safety	3	3
Internal/prison certificate	7	10
Other	8	14

** Excludes internal/prison certificates.

Clearly, the opportunity to obtain certain types of qualifications will be restricted by sentence length in many cases. Table 5.5 displays the qualifications obtained or worked towards by sentence length. As expected, there was a wide variation by sentence length. A fifth of respondents serving sentences of up to a year had obtained/worked towards at least one qualification, rising to 47 per cent of respondents serving between one and four years, and 67 per cent of respondents serving over four years.

The qualifications available to short-sentence respondents comprised mainly NVQ level 1 certificates, City and Guilds and clerical qualifications. Medium-term sentence inmates were more likely to be studying for NVQ level II, and it was only really the longer-term inmates who were

studying for anything higher. Seven per cent of inmates serving sentences of over four years had worked towards a GCSE, four per cent an A-level and four per cent were studying towards a degree.

Table 5.5: Qualifications obtained or worked towards during sentence, by sentence length

Base: all respondents

	Up to 1 year	Over 1 year, up to 4 years	Over 4 years
Unweighted base:	119	294	149
Weighted base:	125	293	144
	%	%	%
Any*	20	47	67
Degree	–	1	4
'A' level(s)	–	1	4
GCSE(s)	1	1	7
City and Guilds	4	7	13
RSA/Pitmans/other clerical/ commercial qualification	4	12	19
NVQ Level III/ GNVQ Advanced	1	2	5
NVQ Level II/ GNVQ Intermediate	1	11	21
NVQ Level I/ GNVQ Foundation	6	13	20
NVQ/GNVQ (level not known)	4	2	3
Any NVQ	12	26	38
Health and Hygiene/ Health and Safety	1	5	3
Internal/prison certificate	6	10	11
Other	6	15	25

* Excludes internal/prison certificates

Training offered to inmates with no previous qualifications

As discussed in Chapter 3, the majority of inmates (61%) began their sentence with no previous qualifications. Thus, prison offers a good potential to help address this gap in skills. However, the results indicate that the opposite picture is true. Prison training leading to a qualification was in fact *more* likely to be given to inmates who already held at least one qualification.

Over half (56%) of those with prior qualifications were working towards qualifications, compared with only 39 per cent of those without. This leaves a majority of inmates with no prior educational achievement in danger of leaving prison still without any qualification.

Respondents with previous qualifications were around twice as likely to have aimed for a clerical qualification, and one-and-a-half times as likely to have studied for an NVQ.

It should be noted that these differences are not explained by different sentence length profiles. The sentence length profile of respondents with prior qualifications mirrored that of those without. The results indicate that training courses should be better targeted towards those inmates with the greatest need to build their skills. The level of unmet training need is explored in more detail in the following section.

Table 5.6: Qualifications obtained or worked towards during sentence by whether any qualifications held prior to prison

Base: all prison respondents

	Had qualifications before	No qualifications before
Unweighted base:	218	349
Weighted base:	220	347
	%	%
Any*	56	39
Degree	2	1
'A' level(s)	2	1
GCSE(s)	2	3
City and Guilds	8	7
RSA/Pitmans/other clerical/ commercial qualification	17	8
NVQ Level III/GNVQ Advanced	4	1
NVQ Level II/GNVQ Intermediate	16	9
NVQ Level I/GNVQ Foundation	15	12
NVQ/GNVQ (level not known)	3	3
Any NVQ	33	21
Health and Hygiene/Health and Safety	5	2
Internal/prison certificate	10	9
Other	19	11

* Excludes internal/prison certificates.

Unmet educational needs

The results described in the section above indicate that there is a significant proportion of inmates lacking educational qualifications who have not had the opportunity to address this deficiency while at prison. The results are backed up by the respondents themselves. When asked whether there were any courses which they would like to have done, but which had not been available to them, a half (51%) said that this was the case. Younger respondents under 30 were particularly likely to agree with this (57% compared with 44% of respondents aged 30+), as were black respondents (60% compared with 48% white). Those admitting literacy or numeracy problems also expressed a greater level of unmet need (61% compared with 50% of those without any such problems).

Table 5.7 shows which types of courses respondents would like to have done, had they been available. The most popular choices were hairdressing/beauty (13% of those wanting further courses), business studies/admin/WP (12%), catering (9%), counselling/child care/voluntary work etc. (9%), and offender behaviour courses (9%). A quarter of the 44 respondents with literacy or numeracy problems who wanted further help mentioned the need for more basic skills training, corroborating the results discussed earlier in this chapter in the section on *Courses to help with literacy and numeracy.*

Table 5.7: Courses which respondents would have liked to do which were not available

Base: all prison respondents who would like to do courses which have not been available

	Total
Unweighted base:	302
Weighted base:	291
	%
Hairdressing/beauty	13
Business studies/admin/WP	12
Catering/home economics	9
Offender behaviour	9
Counselling/social/child care/voluntary work	9
Reading/writing/numbers	8
Trade skills (joinery/bricklaying, painting and decorating etc.)	8
Computers/IT	7
Art/craft	7
Sports/gym	7
Confidence/assertion/social skills	5
Sewing/dressmaking/soft furnishing/upholstery	5
Psychology/sociology	4
Languages	4
Theatre/music/drama	4
Accounting/book-keeping	3
Other	15

Respondents who had not had the opportunity to do courses that they wanted were asked why this was the case. In the large majority of cases (61%) this was simply because the

prison did not run the course. A further quarter (23%) of this subset said the course was available, but there was a lack of vacancies. The majority of the remainder complained that courses were not available to inmates on short sentences.

There were also some specific complaints in relation to the nature of training activity at Holloway, for example:

> *"Either the prison does not run these courses or they are over-subscribed. Although this is a holding prison some of the girls are on remand for a year and they need something to do"*

> *"They never keep you here long enough to do a course. I was just talking to a tutor about going on a course and he doesn't think that it is worthwhile because I will start it and then be transferred. Nobody knows what will happen to them here".*

Job skills training

Aside from specific educational and vocational needs, many prisoners also require help in job-seeking skills to prepare them for release, especially in the context of the added barrier of a criminal record. It should be noted that responsibility for job skills training lies with the resettlement departments rather than prison education/training departments. However, we still considered it useful to discover what training women had received in this area.

Respondents were asked what types of job-seeking skills they had received help with during their sentence. It was clear that very few prisoners received such help, although younger prisoners and those with longer sentences were more likely than average to receive help in these areas.

About a quarter of respondents had received help in at least one area asked about. The most common type of help was in the form of completing application forms or CVs, although only one in six inmates (16%) had received this. Young offenders were the most likely to have received help in these areas, particularly with application forms/CVs and interview skills training. Two-fifths (38%) of young offenders had received some form of job-seeking skills training, about twice the proportion among those aged 30 and over.

The likelihood of receiving this type of training also varied by sentence length with longer-term prisoners slightly more likely to receive it compared to short-sentence inmates. Only one in seven (15%) inmates serving sentences of at least a year had received any form of training in this area. Details are in Table 5.8.

Table 5.8: Training or help received in job-seeking skills

Base: all prison respondents

		Age group			Sentence length		
	Total	18–20	21–29	30–39	Up to 1 year	1–4 years	Over 4 years
Unweighted base:	567	66	269	229	119	294	149
Weighted base:	567	61	274	229	125	293	144
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
How to look for vacancies	10	14	9	10	4	12	11
Application forms/CVs	16	26	15	13	10	17	19
Info. about available vacancies (e.g. through job agency)	6	7	6	7	4	8	6
Temporary release for interview	4	1	4	5	1	5	5
Interview skills training	8	16	8	7	2	10	11
Other help with getting job on release	7	10	7	7	3	9	8
Any of the above	23	38	24	21	15	27	23

Numbers in age groups and sentence length groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data.

Update: qualifications obtained in prison by sample of ex-prisoners

As we saw earlier in this chapter, 29 per cent of the initial sample of inmates had already obtained a qualification at the time of the interview, and a further 17 per cent were working towards one. By the time of the post-release interview, 44 per cent said that they had obtained a qualification while in prison. Inmates serving sentences of at least one year were more likely to have done so compared with those serving shorter sentences (52% compared with 39%).

Table 5.9 shows all qualifications gained by the sample of ex-prisoners while in prison. NVQ level I, City and Guilds and clerical qualifications were the most common.

Table 5.9: Qualifications obtained during sentence by follow-up sample

Base: all follow-up respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	178
Weighted base:	178
	%
Any**	44
Degree	–
'A' level(s)	*
GCSE(s)	1
City and Guilds	11
RSA/Pitmans/other clerical/commercial qualification	11
NVQ Level III/GNVQ Advanced	3
NVQ Level II/GNVQ Intermediate	9
NVQ Level I/GNVQ Foundation	15
NVQ/GNVQ (level not known)	*
Any NVQ	23
Sports/weightlifting qualification	4
Internal/prison certificate	5
Other	4

** Excludes internal/prison certificates.

As we saw earlier in the section on *"Training offered to inmates with no previous qualifications"*, inmates who already possessed qualifications prior to their prison sentence were more likely to be working towards a qualification in prison than those with no previous educational achievement.

This suggests that prisons could do more to focus efforts on those inmates most at need, and this view is further reinforced by the results of the follow-up survey. Fifty-five per cent of inmates with pre-prison qualifications succeeded in gaining qualifications in prison, compared with only 36 per cent of those with no previous educational portfolio.

Pre-release courses

The sample of ex-prisoners was asked whether they received any help prior to their release. Forty-four per cent received some form of pre-release help; details are shown in Table 5.10.

The proportion of inmates receiving pre-release help varied by sentence length, with 56per cent of inmates in for more than a year receiving such help, compared with only 36 per cent of inmates serving shorter sentences.

According to those respondents who received help of this nature, it was mainly organised by the prison (60%) or by the Probation Service (28%). The majority of those who did receive pre-release help (76%) found it useful.

Of those who did not receive any help, 64 per cent said that they would have found this useful had it been available.

Table 5.10: Pre- release help

Base: all follow-up respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	178
Weighted base:	178
	%
Any	44
Money/benefit receipt	10
Jobsearch skills	9
Avoiding drug/alcohol misuse	7
Accommodation	5
Education/training	4
Avoiding reoffending	4
Emotional problems/depression	1
Other	3

6 Intentions for release

This chapter covers prisoners' intentions for their release with regard to their domestic situation, their employment status and any plans for further education or training. We also explore the barriers that exist for the uptake of employment on release, and prisoners' views on what more help they consider they need from the prison to help prepare them for release. All results are based on the sample of 567 inmates interviewed in the initial survey.

Expected domestic situation on release

Nearly all inmates knew who they would be living with on release. The sample was roughly evenly divided between those who anticipated living alone, with parents/parents-in-law, with their partner or as lone parents. Details are shown in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Who do you think you will be living with after release?

Base: all prison respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	567
Weighted base:	567
	%
With parents/parents-in-law	26
With husband/partner/boyfriend	21
Alone	20
With dependent children only	20
With other adult relations	4
With friends	3
Hostel/rehab	2
Don't know	4

The majority of women with dependent children saw themselves returning to live with their children. In total, 71 per cent of prisoners with children considered this to be the case.

Just under half (44%) of respondents expected to be living in council or housing association accommodation on release, with a fifth in owner occupied premises, 16 per cent in hostels or temporary accommodation and 11 per cent renting privately (see Table 6.2).

A third of all prisoners said that on release they would return to the accommodation they were living in before they went to prison. Those who would not be returning to their previous accommodation were asked what kind of accommodation they anticipated entering on release. The expected tenure of all prisoners is shown in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Expected tenure on release

Base: all prison respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	567
Weighted base:	567
	%
Owner-occupied	20
Council/housing association	44
Rented privately	11
Bedsit	2
Hostel/temporary accommodation	16
Streets	*
Other	3
Don't know	2

Compared with respondents' tenure at the time of imprisonment (see Table 2.5), the main shift was from rented accommodation to temporary accommodation. Fifteen per cent of those who were originally renting from the council or a housing association expected to live in a hostel immediately on release. Among those who had originally been renting privately, a quarter (26%) expected to move to council or housing association-rented property on release and 14 per cent saw themselves living in a hostel. Around one in six (16%) in total expected to be living in temporary accommodation on release.

Expected employment status on release

One in seven (14%) respondents had already planned employment for their release. However, the majority were anticipating being either unemployed (42%) or at home with domestic responsibilities (29%).

Expected employment status varied by age, with younger respondents under 30 more likely to see themselves as unemployed and seeking work or in education or training, and less likely to see themselves looking after home or family.

Respondents with dependent children were considerably less likely to expect themselves to be seeking employment immediately on release compared to those without. The details are displayed in Table 6.3.

Table 6.3: Expected working status immediately on release

Base: all prison respondents

		Age			Children	
	Total	18–20	21–29	30–40	Dependent children	No dependent children
Unweighted base:	567	66	269	229	371	196
Weighted base:	567	61	274	229	375	192
	%	%	%	%	%	%
In work	14	18	11	16	13	16
Unempl. and seeking work	34	38	39	28	28	48
Unempl., not seeking work	8	15	7	7	7	9
Looking after home/family	29	16	31	30	39	9
Caring for relative	1	2	*	2	1	1
Full-time education/training	5	13	6	1	3	8
Part-time education/training	7	5	7	7	7	6
Long-term sick/disabled	2	-	2	3	2	3
Living off crime/prostitution	1	2	*	2	1	-
Rebuild life/look for home etc.	6	3	6	7	6	6
Other	3	2	1	5	3	3

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data in three cases. Respondents could choose more than one response, so percentages total more than 100.

Jobs already arranged on release

As discussed above, one in seven respondents (14%) already had a job arranged for their release at the time of interview. Respondents serving shorter sentence lengths were much more likely to have made such preparations (19% serving up to a year, 14% serving between one and four years and 10% serving sentences of over four years).

Propensity to pre-arrange a job also varied by inmates' previous experience of work. Those who had a job within the 12 months prior to beginning their sentence were four times more likely to have done so than those without this experience (24% compared with 6%). In fact the majority of the 81 respondents with a pre-arranged job (65%) were going back to the same job as before. A further quarter (24%) of this sub-group had arranged their job through friends or relatives on the outside. Only seven per cent had obtained the job through prison application procedures.

This demonstrates that, for this sub-group, the women's prison experience had very little to do with their success in arranging a job. This is backed up by the women themselves; only 12 per cent of those with a pre-arranged job said that their prison work, education or training had helped them secure this job.

However, a third (31%) of those with a pre-arranged job said that their job was in the same line of work as a job they had held in prison. Thus, this suggests that any correspondence between prison experience and jobs arranged on the outside was more coincidental than causal.

Job-seeking intentions on release

The large majority (86%) of respondents had no job to go to immediately on release. However, the majority of this sub-group (79%) did intend to look for work on release. The members of this sub-group who lacked work experience before prison were slightly less likely to consider themselves to seek work on release (71% compared to 81% with such experience). Presence of children did not deter women's job-seeking intentions – women with children in this sub-group were as likely to intend to seek work (78%) as those without (81%).

However, not all women saw themselves actively seeking work in the period immediately on release (see Table 6.4). Two-fifths (42%) of those who intend to look for a job said that they would look immediately, and a further 40 per cent intended to look within six months of their release. Younger respondents aged 18 to 20, and respondents without children, were more keen to start looking immediately (59% and 61% respectively).

Table 6.4: How long after release did respondents intend to seek work

Base: all prison respondents intending to look for work

	Total
Unweighted base:	383
Weighted base:	385
	%
Immediately	42
Within 1 month	19
1 month, up to 3 months	15
3 months, up to 6 months	6
6 months, up to 1 year	6
1 year or longer	2
Don't know	9

Those who intended to seek work at any stage after release were asked what sort of work they would be looking for. A fifth (19%) simply said "anything going", and one in six (16%) intended to look for the same type of job as they did before prison. The remainder mentioned a specific type of job. A wide range of occupations were mentioned, and these jobs are detailed in Table 6.5 below.

Table 6.5: Type of work respondents intended to look for on release

Base: all prison respondents intending to look for work

	Total
Unweighted base:	383
Weighted base:	385
	%
Anything going	19
Anything that pays enough	5
Same type of job as before	16
Admin/office/secretarial/clerical	9
Shop/sales	5
Catering	5
Computers	5
Care/elderly/children	4
Hairdressing	4
Factory	4
Education	3
Cleaning	3
Other	8
Don't know	10

Respondents could give more than one answer, so percentages total more than 100.

Respondents were generally optimistic that they would find the type of work they ideally sought within 12 months of release. Seven in ten (70%) thought it likely – 34 per cent "very likely". Inmates aged 30 or over and those with previous further education experience were more likely to anticipate success (77% and 82% respectively).

Those who did not consider it likely that they would find the type of work they ideally sought were asked their reasons. The large majority of these 72 respondents saw their prison record as the principal barrier (69%).

A subset of 349 respondents who were intending to seek work had also worked during their prison sentence. These respondents were asked whether they intended to seek work in the same line as any of the prison work they had done and a third (32%) said that they would. This suggests some degree of correspondence between prison work experience and "real" jobs on the outside.

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Those who said they were *not* intending to look for a job on release were asked whether there were any particular reasons for this. A third (32%) said they would be in education or training, with a similar figure (31%) looking after children. One in eight (13%) said they were too sick or ill to work and one in ten (10%) wanted some time to settle.

Intentions for further education or training on release

One in nine (11%) expected to enter a period of further education or training immediately on release; and a further fifth (19%) planned to begin a course on release (see Table 6.6). Thus, nearly a third of inmates had actively planned a course of education or training for their release. Young offenders were particularly likely to intend to follow this course of action (49%) as were black inmates (51%). Respondents with no previous education or training beyond school were much less likely to have such plans. Only a quarter (23%) of this subset intended to undertake a course of training on release. This implies that more could be done to help encourage women who lack any prior skills or qualifications to redress this on release.

Table 6.6: Intentions for further education or training on release

Base: all prison respondents

		Age			Previous education/training	
	Total	18–20	21–29	30–40	Yes	No
Unweighted base:	567	66	269	229	208	359
Weighted base:	567	61	274	229	211	356
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes– immediately on release	11	18	13	8	12	11
Yes – planned	19	31	14	17	30	12
Yes – intend to at some stage after release	34	25	42	26	36	32
No intentions	28	21	22	40	14	37
Don't know	8	10	9	8	9	8

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data in three cases.

Barriers to employment on release

Personal and domestic problems

Despite women's optimism for finding employment (see earlier section *"Job-seeking intentions on release"*), it is clear that there are a number of factors which could potentially hinder the success of newly released prisoners in the labour market. Personal, financial and domestic problems are all potential obstacles which released inmates may have to face. To investigate the extent to which this was likely to be the case, respondents were asked whether they foresaw problems on release in a number of areas. Responses are shown in Table 6.7.

Table 6.7: Anticipated problems on release

Base: all prison respondents

		Sentence length			Ethnicity	
	Total	Up to 1 year	1–4 years	> 4 years	White	Black
Unweighted base:	567	119	294	149	445	91
Weighted base:	567	125	293	144	455	83
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Managing financially	45	44	49	38	44	57
Accommodation	32	29	33	31	30	46
Children	17	18	16	20	16	24
Relationships with partner/family	20	17	21	20	20	21
Drugs or alcohol	19	20	23	10	21	11
Other problems	25	21	24	30	25	28
Any problems	73	64	74	78	71	87

Numbers in sentence length groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing data for five cases.

Few respondents expected life to be problem-free on release. Around three-quarters of respondents expected to have problems in at least one of these areas.

Around half (45%) anticipated problems managing financially, and a third (32%) with their accommodation. Around a fifth of the sample foresaw problems with each of children,

relationships and drugs or alcohol. Those serving longer sentences in excess of four years were less likely to consider that finances will be a problem, and also less likely to consider that drugs or alcohol will be a problem – this is despite the fact that a large proportion of drugs offenders were in prison for this time. This latter finding is possibly explained by the longer period in which offenders have to overcome any drug or alcohol problem they may have.

Black respondents were considerably more likely to envisage problems with their finances, accommodation or children. Respondents with literacy or numeracy problems are also more likely to forecast problems in each of these areas. For example, 53 per cent of this subset considered that they would have financial problems compared to 44 per cent of those without such problems. There were similar differentials with respect to problems with children (30% compared with 16%), and problems with relationships (28% compared with 19%).

A quarter of respondents mentioned "other" problems, which covered a wide spectrum of circumstances including problems readjusting (8% of all respondents), depression (2%) and presence of criminal record (2%). Some illustrative comments are given below:

> *"General living and dealing with people. Knowing how to behave and knowing how to speak to and treat people because even dealing with money is a problem"*

> *"Just basically fitting back into society after being shut away for so long. To cope with living on your own after being told what to do for so long. Getting to know your children...to go shopping, just being able to pick up the pieces again. These things sound so trivial but they are so important".*

Level of support

As discussed above, around three-quarters of respondents anticipated that they would have some problems in their personal or domestic life on release. Information was sought among this sub-group on the expected level of help with these problems. Four-fifths of these inmates considered that they would have some support – mainly in the form of family (58%), friends (24%) or their probation officer (27%). Details are in Table 6.8.

Prisoners serving longer sentences were more likely to perceive that they would get some level of support (83% serving sentences of over a year compared with 69% serving up to one year).

Table 6.8: Who could the inmate turn to for help with problems

Base: all prison respondents foreseeing personal or domestic problems on release

	Total
Unweighted base:	415
Weighted base:	413
	%
Anyone	80
Family	58
Probation officer	27
Friends outside prison	24
Social worker	6
Other inmates	5
Voluntary/statutory agency	4
Doctor/counsellor/psychiatrist	4
Other person	9
No-one	20

Respondents could name more than one source of help, so percentages total more than 100.

Perceived likelihood of reoffending

All respondents were asked: *"Realistically, how likely do you think it is that you will go back to crime at some stage after you are released?"*

Expected levels of reoffending were low and do not correspond with current levels of recidivism (Prison Statistics England & Wales, 1997, p.156, quote 46% of female offenders discharged in 1994 as being reconvicted within two years of discharge). In the survey, one in seven (15%) considered themselves either "very" or "fairly" likely to reoffend (see Table 6.9). Expected levels of recidivism were correlated with a number of factors. Those sub-groups who were particularly likely to consider themselves at risk were burglary and robbery offenders (26%), prisoners serving more than one sentence (29%), inmates lacking any prior qualifications (20%) or a job within the 12 months before starting their sentence (22%), and those with literacy or numeracy problems (20%).

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Table 6.9: How likely is it that the respondent will return to crime at some stage in future?

Base: all prison respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	567
Weighted base:	567
	%
Very likely	6
Fairly likely	9
Not very likely	17
Not at all likely	62
N/A - have not committed crime	3
Don't know	4

Expectations of reoffending were also strongly related to anticipation of problems upon discharge. For example, 19 per cent of those predicting financial problems saw themselves at risk of reoffending compared with 12 per cent of those without. There was a similar differential with respect to anticipated problems with children (21% compared with 13%), although the largest differential was found in respect of drug or alcohol problems. Half (48%) of offenders expecting problems in this area saw themselves as potential reoffenders compared with only six per cent of those who did not expect such problems.

Perceptions of how prison can help prevent reoffending

Two-fifths (40%) of the total sample considered that their prison experience had helped them in some way towards avoiding crime in the future, which is an encouraging finding. This proportion is strongly related to the type of experience which respondents have had in prison. Those serving longer sentences of over four years were particularly likely to acknowledge benefits in the system (53%), as were those who considered themselves to have learnt new work skills (47%), who had received education or training during their sentence (46%), who had achieved or were working towards qualifications (51%) or who had received training in job-seeking skills (59%).

The 233 respondents who acknowledged a positive link between their prison experience and avoiding crime in the future were asked what particular aspects they considered helpful (see Table 6.10). A wide variety of responses were given, ranging from simply "prison itself" (42%), to offender behaviour/drug awareness courses (18%), self-analysis/self-improvement (17%), courses or skills (17%), and the wrench of being apart from family or children (15%).

Table 6.10: What has the respondent done or learnt in prison which will help them avoid crime in the future?

Base: all prison respondents who consider that prison will help them avoid crime in future

	Total
Unweighted base:	233
Weighted base:	227
	%
Prison itself/the sentence/the time/denial of freedom	42
Offending behaviour/drugs awareness courses	18
Self-analysis/self-improvement	17
Courses/skills/education/qualifications	17
Being away from family/children	15
Stopped taking drugs	7
Groups/counselling	3
Other people's stories/experience	6
Seeing people go out and come back in	2
Other	6

For example:

"It has given me time to think. I am more strong minded. I have goals to achieve"

"I have learnt to be more aware and cautious...keeping myself to myself and standing on my own two feet and not relying on anyone else"

"You lose your home, your freedom, your kids. And you lose family trust. To lose the bond with your child is pretty devastating"

"Having a job and a normal routine, living almost a normal life. It's the first real job I have had".

Perceptions of how prison can better prepare inmates for release

All respondents were asked their views on how prison could better prepare them for release (see Table 6.11). A third (31%) could not think of any ways in which the Prison Service could improve. The responses given by the remaining 69 per cent of respondents were wide-ranging. The principal suggestions were better preparation for learning how to re-integrate into society (particularly after long sentences) (16%), more help in finding accommodation (12%), more help in finding work (12%), and greater flexibility in allowing home leave (11%). Other responses included more offender behaviour or drug/alcohol abuse courses (8%), a better range of courses (8%), and allowing inmates to work or study in the community (6%).

Table 6.11: How can prison better prepare inmates for release

Base: all prison respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	567
Weighted base:	567
	%
Better preparation for/more courses on learning to re-enter society	16
Help/advice on finding housing	12
Help/advice in finding a job/pre-release job training/job club	12
More home/resettlement leave/more temporary releases to get to know children again	11
More/better courses	8
Offender behaviour/anger management./drugs courses	8
Allow outside job/work/college experience	6
Better support system after leave	3
Day release for interviews/to look for work	3
Other	11
No suggestions made	31

Respondents could make more than one suggestion so percentages total more than 100.

Some comments made by inmates are given below to help illustrate these points:

"I would like to have better education in here. NVQ is too long a course, people aren't here long enough to complete the courses. Short courses would be better"

"There should be some sort of sheltered housing for longer term offenders to support them in everyday life so they can take the responsibility for their lives more slowly"

"What they could do is organise job clubs and interview skills and things like that. They do not do any of that here"

"Have someone from colleges telling you what is available"

"Work harder on the long timers. I have done nearly five years and haven't spent any time with my family. I live too far for my family to come and visit me. Long-termers need much more attention"

"They could do a job club scheme. If you're serious about wanting a job, they could prepare you 8 weeks before release. If you are still in prison and looking you could register every obstacle you come across and get it sorted. If you start the ball rolling from here at least you would have some help"

"They should teach you more about going for jobs, like a job interview. I have never filled out a form for a job and I don't understand them. The only things they teach you here are basic things like cooking and basic English – stupid things....They did a lot more for the men when it was their prison"

"Get more involved with employment, accommodation, to set you up with something before you leave instead of taking the attitude it doesn't matter she's out now. The day you come in should be worked towards the day you are released... give us the opportunity to do it for ourselves"

"Offending behaviour courses would be useful but they only select 8 inmates a month and so there is a lot of waiting".

7 Experience on release

This chapter covers the experiences of women upon release, in terms of finding accommodation, dealing with the Probation Service, experience of Home Detention Curfew, general problems on release, financial situation, and tendency towards reoffending. All results in this and the following two chapters are based on the sample of 178 ex-prisoners interviewed in the follow-up survey. Where results are shown by age-group, this refers to women's ages at the time of the initial interview. Where results are shown by sentence length, this refers to the original sentence length rather than time actually served (which will normally be roughly half that of the sentence length).

Accommodation

Four-fifths (79%) of ex-prisoners said that they had an address to go to on release, even if only temporary. However, this accommodation was often unstable, a third of these (35%) having moved on again since. Those without an immediate address were mainly housed in a probation hostel or other temporary accommodation (72% of this sub-group).

At the time of interview, a fifth (19%) were living alone, a quarter (25%) with a partner, a fifth (21%) with parents, and a further 25% as single mothers living with dependent children only. The majority were renting from the social housing sector (47%), the remainder evenly split between owner-occupied homes and private renting. Details are contained in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Accommodation situation at time of interview

Base: all follow-up respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	178
Weighted base:	178
	%
Who living with	
Alone	19
With husband/partner	25
With parents/in-laws	21
With dependent children only	25
With friends	6
Other	3
Tenure	
Owner-occupied	20
Council/housing association	47
Rented privately	22
Bedsit	2
Hostel/temporary accommodation	6
Other	2

Less than half (43%) of all ex-prisoners interviewed ended up at the same address as where they resided before prison, thus highlighting the unstable nature of women's accommodation situation on release. Prisoners serving sentences of up to one year were twice as likely to return to the same accommodation as those serving longer sentences (64% compared with 32%).

Two-thirds (67%) of ex-prisoners had children under the age of 18. Of this group, 68 per cent were living with all of their children, a third having children residing elsewhere. These children were mainly living with ex-partners (29%) or with parents/parents-in-law (22%).

The women's accommodation situation was very similar to that predicted from their expectations (see Chapter 6). One small difference is that more women were renting privately than expected (22% compared with 11%), and fewer were based in hostels/temporary accommodation compared with expected (6% compared with 16%). However, this latter difference may be due to the fact that those who ended up in such accommodation were harder to trace and to interview.

Probation Service and Home Detention Curfew

Home Detention Curfew (HDC) began at the start of 1999, and allowed prisoners sentenced to at least three months but less than four years (and who pass a risk assessment) to be released early, providing they abide by a curfew which is monitored electronically. The main aim of HDC is to help prisoners with the transition from custody to the community. Due to the recency of the scheme at the time of interview, and the strict eligibility criteria, only five respondents had had experience of this, and thus the base is too small on which to describe their experiences.

Four-fifths (82%) of ex-prisoners had had some contact with the Probation Service on release. Among the small sample of 30 young offenders, this was particularly likely (92%). Women serving sentences of over one year were more likely to have had contact compared with shorter-term ex-prisoners (98% compared with 50%). These comparisons are not surprising as all young offenders and those sentenced to a year or more in custody are legally subject to probation supervision on release.

Those who had had contact were asked in which areas they had received help. The results are shown in Table 7.2.

Opinions of the Probation Service were not especially positive, with only half (52%) acknowledging that they had been of some help. One in six (17%) stated that the Service had been "not very" helpful and a third (31%) thought them "not at all" helpful.

Table 7.2: Help received from Probation Officer

Base: all follow-up respondents having contact

	Total
Unweighted base:	147
Weighted base:	146
	%
Claiming benefits	32
Accommodation/housing	28
Settling back into the community	28
Employment/jobsearch	23
Education and training	17

Personal and domestic problems since release

In Chapter 6, we saw that the majority of inmates were anticipating problems of a personal, financial or domestic nature on release. This was borne out in practice, with 91 per cent reporting problems experienced on release. Principal difficulties were money (63%), depression/emotional problems (49%), accommodation (39%) and problems re-adjusting (36%). Other problems experienced by significant levels of inmates included drugs (25%), relationship problems (25%) and problems with the family or children. Longer-term sentenced prisoners had a greater propensity to experience problems with accommodation, drugs, depression and re-adjustment to life outside. Details of problems experienced by respondents are contained in Table 7.3.

Table 7.3: Problems experienced on release

Base: all follow-up respondents

		Time served	
	Total	Up to 1 year	> 1 year
Unweighted base:	178	104	74
Weighted base:	178	104	74
	%	%	%
Any	91	90	93
Money	63	63	62
Depression/emotional problems	49	50	49
Accommodation	39	30	53
Re-adjusting to life outside	36	32	41
Drugs	25	21	31
Family (other than children)	18	19	16
Health problems	18	19	16
Obtaining custody of children	12	7	18
Other problems with children	10	11	11
Alcohol	9	6	11
Physical/sexual abuse	4	3	4
Other	*	1	–

As Table 7.3 demonstrates, the large majority of women have experienced problems on release. However, it is reassuring to discover that the majority of women consider themselves to have at least one person to whom they can turn to help them with these problems. Family (68%) and friends (46%) were the principal sources of help among those experiencing problems; secondary sources were the Probation Service (30%), the doctor (24%), drug services (12%) and a counsellor (11%) – see Table7.4.

Respondents were asked whether they considered themselves to have received enough help on release. A little over half (55%) said that they had *not* received sufficient support. When these 96 women were asked what further help or support was needed, the main responses were accommodation (31%), emotional support/talking to a counsellor (21%), help financially (18%) and help finding a job (16%).

Table 7.4: Sources of help for respondents experiencing problems

Base: all follow-up respondents experiencing problems

	Total
Unweighted base:	161
Weighted base:	163
	%
Family	68
Friends	46
Probation Officer	30
Doctor	24
Drug services	12
Counsellor/psychologist	11
Social Services	9
Voluntary/statutory agency	3
Mental health services	3
Other	*
None	10

Financial situation

Three in ten respondents (29%) were cohabiting with a partner. Among those women with a partner, a half (51%) of partners were in work. The large majority of women (78%) stated that either themself or their partner were in receipt of benefit.

Women were asked about their weekly take-home pay from work, benefits or other sources, for themselves and a partner where there was one. The majority (59%) of all respondents, and three-quarters (73%) of single women, were earning no more than £100 a week. The median take-home income among cohabiting women was around £200 a week. Among single mothers (n=46), seven in ten (69%) were taking home no more than £100 a week, see Table 7.5.

Respondents were asked how well they considered themselves to be coping financially. Three in ten (29%) were in debt, either with the rent/mortgage or with any other household expense. However, the majority (56%) considered themselves to be coping financially either "fairly" or "very" well.

Table 7.5: Weekly take-home pay for self and partner by marital status

Base: all follow-up respondents

	Total	Single	Cohabiting
Unweighted base:	178	52	126
Weighted base:	178	52	126
	%	%	%
Less than £50	21	29	4
£51–£100	38	44	21
£101–150	15	13	19
£151–£200	9	6	15
£201–£300	8	6	15
£301 +	9	2	25

Recidivism

In the initial survey, one in seven inmates (15%) considered it either "very" or "fairly" likely that they would reoffend (see the section on *Perceived likelihood of reoffending* in Chapter 6). In the follow-up survey we asked whether women had committed any further offences since release, even if not known about by the police. In order to encourage honesty, and to avoid other members of the household over-hearing, questions on this topic were printed on a card, and respondents needed only to answer "Yes" or "No" or to give a coded response.

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A quarter (24%) of respondents admitted to a further offence since release,[14] higher than the expected levels based on inmates' responses while still inside. Offenders who had already served two or more prison sentences were more likely to admit to further reoffending (45% compared with 16% of ex-prisoners who had served only one custodial sentence). In fact just over half of the recidivists (23 out of 42) had already served at least two custodial sentences.

It is interesting to see to what extent recidivism correlated with these expectations while still inside. Among the sub-sample of inmates followed up on release, 32 stated while still in prison that they were either "very" or "fairly" likely to commit a further offence on release; and 21 of these (66%) fulfilled these expectations. Of the 133 who considered it "unlikely" that they would return to crime, only 21 admitted to having done so (16%). Thus, although the base numbers are too small to draw any strong conclusions, it would appear that there is some degree of correlation between expectations and reality. This would indicate that there is scope to target potential reoffenders while still in prison.

Tendency to reoffend varied by age, with 36 per cent of offenders aged under 25 admitting further criminal activity compared with only 16 per cent of older inmates.

The 42 respondents who had admitted further reoffending were asked why they thought they had done this. The main reasons given were to either support a drug habit (14 people, 33%), or for money more generally (11 people, 26%).

One of the known factors in reoffending is whether former inmates are released back into the same "scene" that led them towards crime in the first place. Two of the recidivists in the sample, when asked their reasons for returning to crime, acknowledged this as a contributory factor:

> *"I got released and my head was in such a mess and with all that money in my pocket I went and got drugs again. That is the only thing you know.... You are let out with no accommodation and so you have to go back to your old friends and old scene and so it goes on again"*

> *"I have come back to where everyone I know is on drugs and I was pushed into starting again so I have to go back on the streets to pay for my fix".*

Ex-prisoners were asked whether they tended to *"go about with the same friends as before prison"*, or whether they mainly went about *"different people"*. In fact, only a fifth (22%)

14 Actual recidivism rates may well be higher than this as we know that at least 14 of the original sample were unable to be re-interviewed due to being back in prison during fieldwork. However, it is not known whether these sentences related to convictions for crimes committed after release or for a previous offence.

said that they were now mixing with the same people as before prison, a half (54%) were now mixing with a different crowd, and the remainder (22%) saying that they did not really mix with anybody these days (the remaining 2% answered "don't know").

When asked *"Realistically, how likely do you think it is that you will continue breaking the law in the future?"*, 28 of the 42 recidivists (67%) considered that this was a likelihood, the majority of these (19) already having served two or more sentences. This demonstrates the difficulty of attempting to rehabilitate the persistent offenders, as criminality seems more a way of life for these people.

Drug use

Two-thirds (67%) of respondents admitted to taking drugs at some stage in their life, with 40 per cent admitting to taking them since release. A third said that they used drugs while in prison.

Younger ex-prisoners, aged under 25 at the time of the first interview, were more likely to have taken drugs at all stages; see Table 7.6 for more details.

Table 7.6: Drug use by ex-prisoners

Base: all follow-up respondents

		Age	
	Total	18–24	25–40
Unweighted base:	178	72	105
Weighted base:	178	70	107
	%	%	%
Taken drugs at all	67	71	64
...before prison	59	67	54
...while in prison	35	39	33
...since release	40	47	36

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing information for one case.

Most drug users in prison and those using since release had been using drugs before their sentence. Only seven respondents (4%) had used drugs for the first time in prison and nine (5%) had used for the first time on release.

Those with a record of drug use were asked whether they had received any advice, support or treatment for drugs since leaving prison. Only a quarter (26%) of this sub-group of 118 respondents said that they had received such help.

8 Employment and education on release

Working status at time of interview

As we saw in Chapter 3, although 82 per cent of inmates had worked at some stage before prison, only about half of these (44%) held a job in the 12 months prior to imprisonment. This was strongly related to age, with young offenders having more recent work experience; about half of all women aged 21 to 40 had had no work experience within the five years prior to their sentence.

The follow-up survey of prisoners indicates that women have not found it easy to re-establish themselves in the workplace since their release. By the time of the follow-up survey, only 25 per cent of ex-prisoners were in employment, whether full- or part-time. Three in ten (30%) described themselves as unemployed, the majority of the remainder looking after the home or family (29%). Details of respondents' employment status at the time of the follow-up interview are contained in Table 8.1.

Propensity to be in work does not vary by age, although younger ex-prisoners aged under 25 were more likely to be unemployed and seeking work, and older ex-prisoners were more likely to be looking after the home. Shorter-term prisoners serving sentences of no more than a year were more likely to have found work compared with longer-term prisoners and were less likely to be unemployed. As would be expected, dependent children also had a bearing on propensity to work, with around two-fifths of all mothers staying at home to bring up the family.

Table 8.1: Employment status at time of follow-up interview

Base: all follow-up respondents

		Age		Sentence length		Dependent children	
	Total	18–24	25+	≤ 1 year	>1 year	Yes	No
				year	year		
Unweighted base:	178	72	105	56	122	117	61
Weighted base:	178	70	107	57	121	119	59
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Working full-time (30+ hours)	16	21	12	20	14	9	30
Working part-time (<30 hours)	9	3	12	10	8	11	5
All working	25	24	24	30	22	20	35
Unempl. and seeking work	23	31	17	17	25	16	37
Unempl., not seeking work	7	9	7	4	8	7	7
Looking after home/family	29	21	35	40	24	42	2
Caring for relative/other	*	–	1	–	1	1	–
Education/training	1	3	1	–	2	1	2
Long-term sick/disabled	9	9	10	3	12	7	14
Living off crime/prostitution	4	3	4	6	2	4	4
Other	1	–	2	–	2	2	–
All not working	75	76	76	70	78	80	65

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing information for one case.

Labour market success is also related to respondents' experiences, although the results show that the most important predictors of post-release success are factors relating to offenders' pre-prison experience rather than their experience in prison itself. For example, offenders who had worked in the 12 months before their sentence were around six times more likely to have secured a job by the time of their post-release interview compared to those with no work experience during this time (44% compared with 7%). In addition, those holding qualifications gained *before* prison were twice as likely to be in employment post-release compared to those without any pre-prison qualifications (34% compared with 19%).

Uptake of educational or training courses in prison did not seem to have any bearing on employment prospects (24% of those taking courses in work compared with 25% of those without). However, those who gained qualifications while inside were significantly more likely to be in work by the post-release interview (34% compared with 18% of those who did not gain any qualifications in prison).

All work experience since release

Although only a quarter were in work at the time of the post-release interview, a little over a third (37%) had worked at some stage since prison. Most of these (77%) had only held one job, and a quarter having worked in two or more jobs since release.

As with employment status at time of interview, the propensity to have worked at all since release varied by sentence length (42% serving up to a year compared with 34% serving longer sentences) and dependent children (33% of those with children compared with 44% of those without). Work experience was once again strongly related to pre-prison experience with 58 per cent of ex-prisoners who had worked in the 12 months before prison finding work again on release compared with only 17 per cent of those with no work experience during these 12 months.

Details of jobs held since release

Here we look at the nature of jobs held post-release. Respondents were asked about their current job or their most recent, if not currently in work.

The majority of respondents working during this period had worked as an employee, and 69 per cent described their job as permanent rather than temporary or fixed contract (see Table 8.2).

Table 8.2: Status of most recent job held since prison

Base: all follow-up respondents with job since prison

	Total
Unweighted base:	67
Weighted base:	65
	%
Employee	91
Self-employed	9
Permanent	69
Temporary/casual	26
Fixed contract	5

Respondents with post-release work experience were asked how they had found their most recent job (see Table 8.3). Jobs tended to be landed through informal rather than formal application procedures. One in six with a job (17%) had returned to the same job as they were doing before. One in three had found the job through contacts or friends known outside prison. The remainder tended to use more formal means such as finding a job through the small ads or through the jobcentre.

Table 8.3 How respondents found most recent job

Base: all follow-up respondents with job since prison

	Total
Unweighted base:	67
Weighted base:	65
	%
Through family/friends known outside prison	29
Job ads in newspapers/magazines	18
Same job as before prison	17
Jobcentre/Employment Service	15
Private employment agency	8
Shop windows/noticeboards	6
Contacting employer direct	3
Through friends/contacts met in prison	3

One of the key potential barriers in finding work post-release is presence of a criminal record. It is of therefore of interest that, of the 61 respondents who had found work as an employee since release, only about half (52%) had informed their employee of their criminal record.

Job satisfaction

Those who had found work since release were asked about their satisfaction with their most recent job. Among this small sub-group, job satisfaction levels were high with 47 per cent professing themselves to be "very" and a further 37 per cent "fairly" satisfied. In fact two-fifths (41%) said that the work they were doing was their ideal line of work.

Among those with post-release jobs, pay tended to be either in line with expectations (41%) or better (25%), with a third (32%) saying that the pay was not as high as expected.

Impact of prison on post-release work

In the earlier section *Working status at time of interview*, we saw that there was relatively little association between post-release labour market success and prison experience. This finding is borne out by asking women directly about this issue. Only 9 per cent of the 67 respondents who had worked since release said that their most recent job was in any way related to a job they held in prison. Thus this further reinforces the view, discussed in Chapter 4, that prison work has little relevance to jobs held in the outside world.

Most jobs gained post-release did not require any special skills or experience, according to the sample of ex-prisoners interviewed. However, of those jobs which did require some skill, the majority said these skills had been gained *before* prison. Only about one in ten with post-release work experience had gained a job requiring a skill which had been learnt or developed while inside; see Table 8.4 for more details.

Table 8.4: Where respondents obtained the skills for current/most recent job

Base: all follow-up respondents with job since prison

	Total
Unweighted base:	67
Weighted base:	65
	%
Skills obtained before prison	42
Skills obtained or enhanced while in prison	9
Skills learnt since leaving prison	3
Don't know	2
No skills required	43

The sample of ex-prisoners with a job were further asked whether they considered various aspects of prison life to have helped them get a job. As shown in Table 8.5, very few felt able to acknowledge a link.

Table 8.5: Whether prison helped respondent to get a job after prison

Base: all follow-up respondents with job since prison

	Total
Unweighted base:	67
Weighted base:	65
	%
Prison work experience	8
Education/training	11
Qualifications gained	8
Any of the above	12

Job search since release

As discussed above, 37 per cent of ex-prisoners interviewed had worked since leaving custody. However, a half (52%) of respondents had spent some time since release actively seeking work. Of those not seeking work, the main reasons given for this included children (38%), health

reasons (21%) and insufficient time to readjust (13%). However, three-quarters of those who had not sought work were intending to look in the future.

Women in the sample who had spent at least some time since their release actively seeking work were asked which methods they had used. The results are shown in Table 8.6.

Table 8.6: Methods used to look for work

Base: all follow-up respondents seeking job since prison

	Total
Unweighted base:	95
Weighted base:	93
	%
Jobcentre	79
Newspapers/magazines	75
Shop windows/notice boards	37
Friends/contacts known outside prison	30
Contacting employer direct (phone, letter or visit)	27
Probation Officer	25
Private employment agency	21
New Deal	18
Friends/contacts met inside prison	8
College	5

The two most commonly mentioned methods of jobsearch were the Jobcentre and local newspapers, both used by around three-quarters of jobseekers. Other methods used by at least a quarter of jobseekers were ads in shop windows (37%), through friends/contacts (30%), contacting the employer direct (27%) and the Probation Service (25%).

Respondents with experience of seeking work were asked how easy or difficult this had been for them. The majority (90%) had encountered problems. Half (49%) said that they had found the task "very" and a further 25% "fairly" difficult.

When asked about the nature of any difficulties, the principal barrier to employment was, unsurprisingly, their criminal record, with 70 per cent of jobseekers saying that this had been a problem. Other problems included a lack of qualifications, experience or available jobs. Details are shown in Table 8.7.

Table 8.7: Difficulties encountered when looking for work

Base: all follow-up respondents seeking job since prison

	Total
Unweighted base:	95
Weighted base:	93
	%
Criminal record	70
Lack of qualifications	16
Lack of available jobs	11
Lack of relevant experience	10
Childcare	9
Drug/alcohol misuse	8
No permanent abode	5
Pay too low	5
Lack of self-confidence	5
Transport	3
Ill-health	3
Other	4
None	10

Attitudes towards employment

Ex-prisoners interviewed in the follow-up survey were asked for their agreement or disagreement with a number of statements designed to measure their attitudes towards work and its meaning. The figures demonstrate that, on the whole, this group had a positive disposition towards work, even if they had difficulty finding it. For example, over half agreed that *"A person must have a job to feel a full member of society"* and seven in ten were in agreement that *"Having almost any job is better than being unemployed"*. On the other hand the majority disagreed that life is rather pointless without a job, and only a quarter believed that benefits will give them more security than trying to earn a wage. It is also reassuring to discover that two-thirds of ex-prisoners believed themselves to possess work-related skills that would make them a good employee. Table 8.8 gives details of respondents' attitudes towards work.

Table 8.8: Attitudes towards work

Base: all follow-up respondents (unweighted base=178; weighted base=178)

	% Agree strongly	% Agree slightly	% Neither agree nor disagree	% Disagree slightly	% Disagree strongly
"A person must have a job to feel a full member of society"	22	26	13	17	20
"Having almost any job is better than being unemployed"	37	25	6	17	15
"If you haven't got a job, life is rather pointless and a waste of time"	10	11	14	19	45
"You could easily get enough satisfaction out of life without a job"	27	26	7	19	20
"For someone like you, benefits give more security than trying to earn a wage"	15	12	12	12	47
"You have many work-related skills that would make you a good employee"	44	21	6	13	15

Education and training after prison

As explored in Chapter 3, the baseline level of educational achievement by inmates before starting their sentence was low, with only about two-fifths holding a pre-sentence qualification. In Chapter 5, we saw that a half had taken some form of course of education or training during their sentence, although this was mainly geared towards inmates who already possessed pre-prison qualifications, leaving those in the greatest need of boosting those skills still lacking.

Among the follow-up sample of respondents, only one in ten (10%) had started a course of education or training since release. However, a further 36 per cent said that they were planning to do some form of further training. Of the remaining 54 per cent with no plans, a half (48%) said that they would like the opportunity to do a course. Among this subset of 47 respondents, the principal barriers for the uptake of further training were children (32%) and a drug/alcohol problems (9%).

The subset of respondents with post-release experience of education or training is too small on which to provide a description of the types of training undertaken. However, those with post-release experience, together those with those planning a course of education or training, were asked whether this course built on anything done while in prison. Three in ten (31%) said that this was the case.

Only six respondents had obtained any form of qualification since release, and two people had participated in the government's New Deal scheme.

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9 Retrospective views on prison

Perceptions of whether prison will help prevent reoffending

In Chapter 6, we saw that around two-fifths of the inmates thought prison life would help them avoid reoffending in the future. It is interesting to revisit the views of these inmates since their release to discover whether these views still held in retrospect.

The results of the follow-up survey show that women were in fact more likely to acknowledge a link between prison and avoiding future crime since being on the outside. Two-thirds (63%) now believe that prison will help them to avoid reoffending in the future.

These views did not seem to vary by respondents' experience of prison in terms of education/training, learning new work skills, or gaining qualifications while inside. This indicates that the impact of prison in terms of avoiding reoffending is more strongly related to the negative aspects of prison life rather than any attempts to rehabilitate.

This view is borne out by women's own responses. When asked why they thought that prison would help them avoid reoffending, the majority attributed this to either their hatred of prison life and not wanting to repeat the experience (30%), the wrench of being apart from children or family (25%), or their loss of freedom (18%). Details are shown in Table 9.1.

Table 9.1: Why respondents believed that prison would help avoid future reoffending

Base: all follow-up respondents who believe that prison will help prevent reoffending

	Total
Unweighted base:	115
Weighted base:	113
	%
Hated prison/never want to go back	30
Being away from children/family	25
Loss of freedom/independence	18
Taught me a lesson	9
Terrifying/frightening experience	7
Prison very degrading	6
Family suffered	6
Institutionalised	4
Other	6

Some actual responses given by women are given below by way of example:

"I would not risk anything to go back there and I do not think that my family would be there for me if I did that same thing again. Being in prison reminds you of how important your family is and I do not think I would do anything to hurt them like that again"

"Who wants to go back there? Even though I was in a Young Offenders [Institution] there's too much talking down to you like you're ten years old. They need to sort out some of their rules e.g. music turned off at nine p.m., reading your private letters before they get to you, not enough association. Just the way you're treated – at times like an animal"

"The hardest bit was being taken away from my children and my son's only 8. All your decision-making is taken away and when I came out I couldn't even decide whether to go to the shops at 10 or 11 – really trivial things. I had to say 'make the decision for me – I can't do it'".

A third (33%) of ex-prisoners considered that their prison experience was not a deterrent for future criminal activity. When asked why, the most frequently given reason among this sub-group was that prison was not a sufficiently bad experience, for some it was more of a "holiday" from their usual life. Others considered prison a training ground for criminal skills, and some considered that they had a criminal "lifestyle" that prison could do nothing to deter (see Table 9.2).

Table 9.2 Why respondents believed that prison would not help avoid future reoffending

Base: all follow-up respondents who believe that prison will not help prevent reoffending

	Total
Unweighted base:	57
Weighted base:	59
	%
Prison is easy/not really punishment/a holiday	26
Learn more criminal skills	17
No deterrent	13
Have a criminal lifestyle	9
Drugs in prison	8
Received no help in prison	7
Prison doesn't teach you anything	7
Been in prison before/not stopped me before	5
Other	25

By way of illustration:

"Because jail is like a holiday camp, everything is done for you – you're fed and clothed. There is nothing to worry about and there is no responsibility"

"It just gives you a break from reality. There is just as much crime and violence and drugs in prison as on the outside"

"It got me wiser really. I have learnt more really, how to do the crime in a better way and not get caught.... and the drugs – there are more drugs in there than I have ever seen or come across before"

"Have been stuck into this since I was little – have been a criminal since I was little and do not know any other way. Plus I am married to a criminal".

Impact of prison on life outside

The sample of former prisoners was asked to reflect on the impact of their prison life more generally. All ex-prisoners were asked whether they considered prison had been helpful to them in various ways. The results are shown in Table 9.3 by age and time served.

Table 9.3: Was prison helpful in any of these ways?

Base: all follow-up respondents

	Total	Age		Sentence length	
		18-24	25+	≤1 year	>1 year
Unweighted base:	178	72	105	56	122
Weighted base:	178	70	107	57	121
	%	%	%	%	%
Improving your work skills	31	40	26	23	36
Learning new work skills	39	49	33	29	44
Getting work experience	25	24	25	16	29
Looking for work	13	23	7	2	18
Improving your confidence	37	44	32	34	37
Improving your social skills	30	39	25	21	35
Stopping reoffending	57	57	57	49	60
Controlling drug or alcohol habit	29	33	26	24	31

Numbers in age groups add to less than the "Total" column because of missing information for one case.

Concurring with the finding in the section above, around three-fifths considered that prison had been helpful in terms of preventing reoffending. However, offenders were less convinced that prison had helped them to learn work or social skills. Around two-fifths considered that prison had helped them to develop new work skills, and a similar proportion thought that prison had helped improve their confidence. However, no more than three in ten considered that they had improved upon existing work skills, gained relevant work experience, improved their job-seeking skills, or their social skills more generally.

Younger respondents, aged under 25, were more likely to acknowledge benefits in the system, particularly in the areas of improving upon or learning new work skills, and looking for work. Also those serving longer sentences of greater than a year were also more positive about the impact of their experiences on their future life.

When asked whether *"All things considered, do you believe the time you spent in prison has helped or will help you in any way in the future?"*, the sample was more or less evenly split, with 53 per cent replying "yes" and 45 per cent "no" (the remainder replying "don't know"). Offenders aged under 25 were more likely to believe that prison had helped or would help them (60% compared with 48% of those aged 25+), as were first-time sentenced offenders (57% compared with 42% of previous offenders) and those who had gained qualifications while in prison (60% compared with 47% of inmates who did not gain a qualification).

When asked in what ways they believed prison had helped, the primary factor was simply not wishing to go back, or having "learnt their lesson" (see Table 9.4). Others considered that prison had helped them learn to appreciate life more, or make them more aware of themselves. Once again, few women mentioned rehabilitative aspects of prison, although 11 per cent of this sub-group cited courses taken in prison as helpful for their release, and 13 per cent cited drug rehabilitation.

Table 9.4: Why respondents believed that prison had helped/would help

Base: all follow-up respondents who believe prison to be helpful

	Total
Unweighted base:	94
Weighted base:	94
	%
Don't want to go back/learnt lesson	29
Learnt to appreciate life/not take things for granted	18
Stopped reoffending	15
Drugs rehabilitation	13
Education/training courses	11
More aware of myself	10
Improved confidence/self-esteem	9
Anger management/control temper	8
Learn to get on with different people/social skills	6
Other	2

Some actual comments made in response to this question are given below:

"The courses have helped, the qualifications will help and have given me the confidence to look forward. It has made me value my children more in my life and made me realise how much I want them and they need me "

"t has given me self-esteem and confidence in myself. It has helped me see the positive rather than the negative all the time"

"It has brought me back to normality. I think more before I do it and I feel as though I have got a future, before I was just plodding on".

On the other hand, 45 per cent of former offenders considered that prison had not helped in any way. Lack of stimulation, courses or help finding work were the main reasons for this negative view, and gaining a criminal record also featured.

Some examples follow:

"Because there was no opportunity to learn proper skills. They have the opinion that we being women are only going to go and have kids and live off benefits"

"Its made things worse. As soon as employers find out you have a criminal record you are automatically a thief. It makes you secluded and unconfident. Loss of self-esteem and respect for yourself and others – especially the law"

"Locking someone in a cell 23 hours a day isn't helping them....What am I learning there? I learnt how to do different types of crime, not how to get a job"

"They did nothing with me at all. Not even the minimum they were supposed to do. Other girls did things I could not because I could not read. My Personal Officer told me because I couldn't read they couldn't offer me anything".

How can prison better prepare for release?

Three-fifths (59%) of women believed that there were ways in which prison could have prepared them better. A fifth of former inmates (19%) mentioned better preparation for release in general, others needing more help in finding work or accommodation. Table 9.5 contains full details of how respondents believed prison could have better prepared them for release.

Table 9.5: How could prison have better prepared respondents for release?

Base: all follow-up respondents

	Total
Unweighted base:	94
Weighted base:	94
	%
No better preparation needed	33
Preparation for release/pre-release courses	19
Help finding work/CVs/application forms etc.	17
Help finding accommodation	11
More info on what help is available	10
Counselling	6
More opportunities for courses/qualifications	5
Home leave	5
Drug/alcohol courses	5
Help with benefits	5
Other	3
Don't know	8

The following responses give some examples of the problems women faced and what further help they needed:

"It was difficult going back to my family home where I had not lived anyway for 16 years. I would have appreciated more help with housing"

"There should be more of a support network for when you get out. You have everything done for you in prison and when you get out you have to do everything for yourself. It is very scary...you do get institutionalised"

"Get you used to crowds, traffic and handling money. It is scary going to public places"

"Done more about helping me get a job, say sending me information about places that help people get a job"

"Help me with my spelling and how to fill in job application forms and what to do for an interview"

"They could have given us forms to claim benefits before our release instead of us waiting until I came home. I went without money for four weeks"

"They could have given us advice on how to apply for jobs or approach employers. How to tell them you have a criminal record".

10 Conclusions and implications for policy

Compared with the equivalent age-group of women in the general population, women inmates face many more difficulties. They have a much lower baseline educational and employment record, are more likely to have dependent children, and have a more unstable financial status. Thus, there is considerable potential for prison to help women develop their skills and potential, and to help them plan their future.

The results indicate that there is considerable scope for improvement in prison regimes to help achieve this. Although a relatively high proportion of inmates acknowledged that they had learnt new skills as a result of prison work, most did not see that these skills would be transferable into the outside workplace. The majority of work opportunities available to women were those that assisted in the maintenance of the prison, and these were generally considered to be either too menial and unskilled to be of use after release, or did not relate to their career aspirations. In addition, few women with prior skills had been given the opportunity to use or build on these in their prison occupation. Choice of occupation was more likely to be driven by the considered "perks" e.g. the enjoyability of the job, the chance to work outside or the money, rather than by the potential to increase their employment chances on release.

There appeared to be little integration of work and training regimes, most women either doing one or the other. Courses were considered useful by most inmates, although the opportunity to take up courses was often limited by short sentence lengths or lack of availability of relevant courses. Prisons have good potential to help women with low baseline qualifications. However, the majority of inmates with no previous educational record were not doing anything in prison to help redress this, nor were they planning anything for after their release. In addition, around half of those with literacy and/or numeracy problems did not consider themselves to have received sufficient help. Thus, the results indicate that courses could be better targeted towards those with the greatest need, which would also help to encourage longer-term planning by inmates.

The results also point to a greater need for training in job-seeking skills, such as interview and application techniques, and how to look for work. These courses, when available, tended to be geared towards the younger inmates and those on longer sentences, although most inmates could benefit from some training in this area.

In the prison survey women were generally optimistic that they would find the right type of work on release. However, this was not borne out in reality, with only about one-third of the former inmates interviewed having found work since release, the prison record representing the major barrier for those who had tried but not succeeded. Of those who had worked on release, few women attributed their work success to any work experience, skills or qualifications gained while inside. Pre-sentence work experience and skills were found to be more important predictors of labour market success.

Consistent with expectations, nearly all women had encountered personal problems on release including difficulties with finances, accommodation, family, depression and drugs. Although most women had good support networks of family or friends and the Probation Service, many considered that they could have received more help.

Levels of recidivism and drug use were relatively high (higher than expectations while still inside). Recidivism rates were highest among those who had already established themselves as persistent offenders. Drug use was exacerbated by women's experience inside, with a third of prisoners admitting use while in prison.

Most women acknowledged a link between prison and avoidance of future criminal activity. However, their reasons were mainly rooted in the "negative" aspects of prison such as denial of freedom, and the conditions of prison, rather than any constructive regime activities. Beyond this, there was a widespread need for more help in planning for their release, in terms of readjusting/re-integration, social skills, housing, finding work, arranging benefits and re-establishing family bonds.

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